The Winding Stair

A. E. W. MASON

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THE WINDING STAIR

Novels by

A. E. W. MASON

THE HOUSE OF THE ARROW
THE WINDING STAIR
THE SUMMONS
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THE WITNESS FOR THE DEFENCE
AT THE VILLA ROSE
A ROMANCE OF WASTDALE
THE FOUR CORNERS OF THE WORLD
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THE COURTSHIP OF MORRICE BUCKLER
MIRANDA OF THE BALCONY
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THE PHILANDERERS
ENSIGN KNIGHTLEY
CLEMENTINA
THE WATCHERS
THE FOUR FEATHERS
THE TRUANTS
THE BROKEN ROAD

THE WINDING STAIR

By

A. E. W. MASON

"All rising to great place is by a winding stair."
—BACON

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LIMITED LONDON

[1923]

Made and Printed in Great Britain by Wyman & Sons Ltd., London, Reading & Fakenham.

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CONTENTS

		PAGE
FLAGS AND PEDIGREE	CHAPTER I	7
THE MAN WITH THE MEDALS	CHAPTER II	23
AT KING'S CORNER	CHAPTER III	32
BETWIXT AND BETWEEN	CHAPTER IV	46
THE VILLA IRIS	CHAPTER V	52
THE ORDER	CHAPTER VI	66
THE PILGRIMAGE	CHAPTER VII	79
HENRIETTE EXPLAINS	CHAPTER VIII	91
MARGUERITE MOVES ON	CHAPTER IX	105
COLONEL VANDERFELT'S LETTER	CHAPTER X	122
A DILEMMA	CHAPTER XI	127
THE LITTLE DOOR IN THE ANGLE	CHAPTER XII	145
THE COMPANIONS OF THE NIGHT	CHAPTER XIII	153
THE TUNIC	CHAPTER XIV	171
ON THE ROOF-TOP	CHAPTER XV	186
MARGUERITE'S WAY	CHAPTER XVI	199
THE OUTCASTS	CHAPTER XVII	210
CAPTAIN LAGUESSIERE'S REPORT	CHAPTER XVIII	228
IN THE SACRED CITY	CHAPTER XIX	245

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CONTENTS

		PAGE
	CHAPTER XX	
THE COUP-DE-GRACE		259
	CHAPTER XXI	
WRITTEN IN THE BOOK		269
	CHAPTER XXII	
THE SPLENDID THROW		284
	CHAPTER XXIII	
THE NECESSARY MAN		296

CHAPTER I

Flags and Pedigree

"I HAVE finished work for the week. I'll see no one else were he as terse as Tacitus," cried Mr. Ferguson the lawyer.

It was six o'clock on a Friday afternoon, and a pleasant rustle of the plane trees in the square came through the open window of the office. Mr. Ferguson thought of his cool garden at Goring, with the river running past, and of the fine long day he would have upon the links to-morrow. Gregory, the head clerk, however, held his ground.

"Perhaps if you would look at this card, Mr. Ferguson."

Mr. Ferguson looked at the size of it.

"By the Lord, no! It's a woman. She'll be as prolix as the devil."

"It's not a woman," the stubborn Gregory insisted.

"Then it's a foreigner, and that's worse."

"It's not even a real foreigner," said Gregory. He had been a servant of the firm for thirty years, and knew the ins and outs of its affairs as thoroughly as the principals.

"You are very annoying, Gregory," said Mr. Ferguson, with a sigh. He took the card regretfully, but when he had read the name printed upon it, he

dropped it upon his table as if it had stung his hand.

"Paul Ravenel!" he said in a low voice, with a glance towards the door. "The son?"

"Yes."

"Is he like the father?"

"Not in the least."

Mr. Ferguson was distressed. It was nine years since he had finished with that affair, settled it up, locked it away and turned his back on it for good—as he thought. And here was the son knocking on his door.

"I must see him, I suppose. I can do no less," he said; but as Gregory turned towards the door he stopped him. "Why should Paul Ravenel come to see me?" he asked himself. "And how much does he know? Wait a moment, Gregory. I have got to go warily here."

He sat down at his desk. Mr. Ferguson was a man of middle age, with a round, genial face and a thick covering of silver-white hair. He looked like a prosperous country gentleman, which he was, and he had the reputation of being the astutest criminal lawyer of his day. He was that, too. His kindly manner concealed him, yet he was not false. For he was at once the best of friends, with his vast experience of the law as a sort of zariba for their refuge, and the most patient and relentless of antagonists; and he had a special kindliness, which showed itself conspicuously in his accounts, for all connected with the arts. It was an old friendship which was troubling him now as he sat at his desk. Paul Ravenel, accord-

ing to his knowledge, would take this or that line in the interview ; Mr. Ferguson must be clear as to how in each case he should answer. Problems were his daily food—at least until six o'clock on Friday evening. Yet this problem he met with discomfort.

" You can show him in now," he said to Gregory, and a few seconds later the visitor stood within the room, a tall, slim youth, brown of face and with hair so golden that the sun seemed to have taken from it the colour which it had tanned upon his cheeks.

" You wish to see me, Mr. Ravenel ? " he asked, and a smile suddenly broke upon the boy's face and made him winning. Mr. Ferguson made a note in his mind of the smile, for he had not as yet its explanation.

" Yes," answered Paul. " I should have been more correct in approaching so prominent a firm had I written asking for an appointment, but I only landed in England this morning, and I couldn't really wait."

His formal little prepared apology broke down in a laugh and an eager rush of words.

" That's all right," said Mr. Ferguson pleasantly. " Take a chair, and tell me what I can do for you."

" You knew my father," said Paul when he had laid down his hat and stick and taken his seat.

Mr. Ferguson allowed himself a sharp glance at the lad. For his tone was without any embarrassment at all, any shame or embarrassment. He was at his ease.

" I knew Mr. Ravenel—yes," Mr. Ferguson answered cautiously.

" He died a fortnight ago."

" I was sorry to notice that you were wearing black."

" He died in a house which he had built upon an island off the coast of Spain, at Aguilas. I lived with him there, during the last eight months, after I left my school at Tours," Paul continued.

" Yes ? " said Mr. Ferguson.

" My father and I were always—how shall I put it ? —in a relationship which precluded any confidences and even any cordiality. It wasn't that we ever quarrelled. We hardly were well enough acquainted for that. But we were uncomfortable in each other's company, and the end of a meal at which we had sat together was to both of us an invariable relief. He had what I think is a special quality of soldiers—he was in the army, of course, wasn't he ? "

Paul broke off to ask his question in the most casual manner. But Mr. Ferguson did not answer it. It was a neat little trap prepared with more skill than the lawyer had expected. For up till the question was unconcernedly dropped in, Paul had been framing his sentences with a sort of pedantry natural to a man who from the nature of his life must get his English words from books rather than from conversation.

" You say Monsieur Ravenel had some special quality of soldiers," Mr. Ferguson observed.

" Yes," Paul explained. " I approached a subject, or I used a phrase, and suddenly it seemed as if an iron door was banged in my face, and he was now behind the door, and not the loudest knocking in the world would ever get it open. So I have come to you."

" For information your father did not see fit to give you," said Mr. Ferguson.

"Yes."

"But Monsieur Ravenel had no doubt a lawyer in Paris and an agent in Casablanca, where he lived for many years, both of whom will be familiar with his affairs. Why come to me?"

"Because it is not about his affairs that I am seeking information," said Paul, and he took a letter from his pocket-case and handed it to Mr. Ferguson. "This was written by your firm, Mr. Ferguson. It is one of the two clues to my father's history which he left behind him. It slipped out of a book upon his shelf."

"Certainly this letter was written by our firm to your father, Mr. Ravenel. But it was the last letter we wrote to him. It closed our connection with him. We never heard from him again; and the letter is, as you have seen, nine years old."

"Exactly," said Paul. "Just about that time my father and I were in London together for a couple of months, and when I found that letter it seemed to me to explain why. My father was in London to arrange for the transfer of his property to France, for the final annihilation of all his interests and associations with this country."

It was an assertion rather than a question, but Mr. Ferguson answered it.

"Yes. I suppose that you may put it that way."

"Before that time, then, you were his advisers?"

"Yes."

"That's why I came to you, Mr. Ferguson," cried the youth eagerly. "I want to know what happened to my father in the days when you were his advisers.

I want to know why he renounced his own country, why he buried himself first in a little distant town on the sea coast of Morocco, like Casablanca, why he took refuge afterwards in a still closer seclusion at Aguilas in Spain. You know! You must know!"

Mr. Ferguson rose from his desk and walked to the fireplace, which was between his desk and the chair on which Paul was seated. He was puzzled by the manner of the appeal. There was more eagerness than anxiety in it. There was certainly no fear. There was even confidence. Mr. Ferguson wondered whether young Ravenel had some explanation of his own, an explanation which quite satisfied him and which he only needed to have confirmed. Paul's voice broke in upon his wondering.

"Of course I can always find out. It's only a question of knowing the ropes. I have no doubt a good inquiry agent could get me the truth in a very few days if I went to one."

Mr. Ferguson lifted himself on his toes and looked up to the ceiling.

"I don't think I should do that," he answered.

"Whether I do or not depends upon you, Mr. Ferguson," said Paul very quietly. "It's not curiosity that's driving me, but I have my life in front of me, and a plan for it."

He rose and stood at the open window for a moment or two, and then turned abruptly back and stood before Mr. Ferguson.

"You see, I was nine years old when I was with my father in London, old enough to notice, and old enough to remember. And one or two very curious

things happened. We were in lodgings in a little quiet street, and except on occasions when, I suppose, he had appointments with you, my father never went out by daylight."

"Here it comes," thought Mr. Ferguson, but his face was quite without expression, and the youth resumed:

"But as soon as darkness fell we took long tramps through the city, where the streets were empty of everything but the lamp-posts, and the only sounds were the hollow sounds of our own footsteps upon the pavement."

"Yes," Mr. Ferguson interrupted. "One couldn't choose a better place for exercise than the City of London after dark."

Paul laughed pleasantly, and Mr. Ferguson reflected: "I have never been called a liar in a prettier fashion."

"On one of these nightly rambles," Paul resumed, "we turned into a street closed at one end by a stately building of pinnacles and a sloping roof, and windows of richly-stained glass. This building was a blaze of light, and in the courtyard in front of it motor-cars and carriages were taking up ladies in bright evening frocks and coats and men with orders upon their breasts."

Mr. Ferguson nodded his head.

"A dinner at the Guildhall, yes."

"It was curious to come suddenly out of darkness and silence and emptiness," Paul Ravenel resumed, "into this gay scene of colour and enjoyment and light. You can imagine how it impressed a child. This was what I wanted. I hated long, empty, echoing

streets, with chains of lamps stretching ahead. Here I heard to me a sound unknown and divine—I heard women laughing. ' Oh, father, do let us stay for a moment and look ! ' I cried, but my father gripped me by the arm, and strode across the road so swiftly that I had to run to keep up with him. There was the mouth of another street nearly opposite, and it was that street which my father wanted to reach."

" Yes ? " said Mr. Ferguson.

" But a man was walking with a limp from the building along the pavement on the far side of our road. It was a hot night, and he carried his overcoat upon his arm, and I saw that a conspicuous row of miniature medals with their coloured ribbons stretched across his left breast. We reached the kerb when he was only a few yards from us. I felt my father's hand tremble suddenly upon my arm. I thought that he was on the point of turning away in flight. But since that would have been more noticeable, he just dropped his head so that the brim of his hat shadowed his face and strode swiftly past the man with the medals. That man only gave us a careless glance, and I heard my father draw a sigh of relief. But a few paces on the man with the medals stopped and looked back. Then he called out, ' Ned ! Ned ! ' in a startled voice, and began to retrace, as fast as his limp would allow him, his steps towards us. My father whispered to me, ' Take no notice, boy ! Walk straight on,' and in a moment dived into the silence of the street opposite. I turned my head after we had travelled a few yards in our new direction, and I saw the man with the medals at the angle of the street peering after us as

if he were undecided whether to follow us or not. There the incident ended, but it was—well—significant, wasn't it ? "

Mr. Ferguson was distinctly uncomfortable. A pair of very steady and watchful grey eyes were fixed upon his. He was being cross-examined, and not clumsily, and by a boy, and all of this he fretfully resented. To do the cross-examining was his function in life, not the other fellow's. Besides, how was he to answer that word significant ? Such a good word ! For it opened no glimpses of the questioner's point of view and was a trap for the questioned.

" Was it significant ? " he asked.

Paul suddenly smiled, and Mr. Ferguson was more perplexed than ever. The boy was not obtuse—that was clear. It was no less clear, then, that he attached some quite special significance of his own invention to the incident he had related. Monsieur Ravenel was in hiding—that's what the incident signified. How had Paul missed it ? What strange amulet was he wearing that saved him from the desolating truth ?

" Did you ever read ' Balaustion's Adventure ' ? " Paul inquired, and Mr. Ferguson jumped.

" I wish you wouldn't spring from one subject to another like that," he answered testily.

" I am on the same subject," said Paul.

" Well, then, I did. I used it as a crib for the ' Alcestis ' when I was at school."

" A pretty good crib, too."

" Very."

" But the translation of the ' Alcestis ' isn't the whole of the poem, is it ? The ' Alcestis ' makes things pretty

black for Admetus, doesn't it? You'd call him a bit of a rotter, wouldn't you? That is, if you take the first surface meaning of the play. But Balaustion found another meaning underneath which transfigures Admetus, turns the black to white. Well, humbly, but just as confidently, I look underneath the first obvious meaning of what I told you. That's disgrace, isn't it? Let's be frank about it! A man in disgrace shunning his friends! There's the surface reading. And there's no other—except mine."

"Let me hear it," said Mr. Ferguson quickly. He returned to the chair at his table. Here might be, after all, a pleasant way out of this disconcerting interview. "Will you smoke?" he asked, and he held out a tin of cigarettes to his visitor.

"Now fire away!" he said. Mr. Ferguson was in a much more cheerful mood.

Discomfort, however, had not vanished from the room. It had passed from Mr. Ferguson. But it had entered into Paul. He stammered, and was shy. Finally he blurted out:

"I find the explanation of everything in my father's passionate love for my mother."

Mr. Ferguson's eyes turned slowly from the plane trees to Paul's face.

"Will you go on, please?"

"My mother was French."

"Yes. Virginia Ravenel. She sang for one season at Covent Garden. She was the most beautiful girl I ever saw in my life." He laughed, tenderly caressing his recollections. "There was a time when I fancied myself your father's rival. You have a look of her,

Mr. Ravenel. She was fair like you," and he was still musing with pleasure and just a touch of regret upon the pangs and ardours of that long-vanished season of summer and magic, when Paul Ravenel thoroughly startled him.

" I think that my mother died in giving me birth," he said. " That's how I explain to myself my father's distance and uneasiness with me. I was the enemy, and worse than that, the enemy who had won. No wonder he couldn't endure me, if with her death his whole world went dark. And everything else follows, doesn't it ? His friends came to mean—not nothing at all, but an actual annoyance, an encroachment on his grief. He shut himself up far away in a little town where no one knew him, and brooded over his loss. And men who do that become extravagant, don't they, and lose their perspective, and do far-fetched, unreasonable things. Thus, my mother was French. So in a sort of distorted tribute to her memory he changed his own nationality and took hers, and with it her name, and cut himself completely off from all his old world—a sort of monk of Love ! "

Mr. Ferguson listened to the boy's speech, which was delivered with a good deal of hesitation, without changing a muscle of his face. So this was why Paul could relate with a laugh the flight from the man with the medals and the lighted courtyard of the Guildhall. This was what he believed ! Well, it was the explanation which a boy ignorant of life, nursed by dreams and poetry and loneliness and eager to believe the world a place of sunlight and high thoughts, might easily have conceived.

"Isn't that the explanation, Mr. Ferguson?" Paul asked; and Mr. Ferguson replied without the twitch of a muscle:

"Absolutely! I did not think that you could have understood your father's reticence so thoroughly."

If one must do a thing, to do it with an air is the best way to carry conviction, thought Mr. Ferguson, and he rose from his chair with a deep relief. The interview was over, his visitor obviously satisfied, he could shake him by the hand and after all catch his train to Goring.

Mr. Ferguson's relief, however, was premature. For the younger man cried:

"Good! For now the way is clear for me, and I can ask you for your professional help."

"Oh!" said the lawyer doubtfully. "I didn't understand that you came as a client. I am not very sure that we can undertake much more than we have upon our hands."

"It's not so much more, Mr. Ferguson."

"I must be the judge of that. Let me hear what it is that you wish."

"I wish to resume my own real nationality," said Paul. "I am of my race. I want the name of it, too."

Paul was of his race. It was not merely the long-legged build of him, nor the cut of his clothes, nor the make of his shoes, but a whole combination of small, indefinable qualities and movements and repressions which proved it.

"I should never have mistaken him for anything

else," thought Mr. Ferguson. There was that little speech, for instance, about his father's love for his mother, halting, shy, stammered, as if he was more than half ashamed of admitting the emotions to another man, and tongue-tied in consequence. The words would have run glibly enough had a French lad spoken them.

"And with my race, I mean, of course, also to resume my father's name," Paul continued.

There had suddenly grown up an antagonism between these two people, and both were aware of it. Paul's questions became a little implacable; Mr. Ferguson's silence a little obstinate.

"You know it, of course, Mr. Ferguson," Paul insisted.

"Of course," replied Mr. Ferguson.

"Will you tell it to me, please?"

"I will not."

"Why not?"

"Your father never told you it. Your father was my client for years, my friend for many more. I respect his wishes."

Paul Ravenel bowed and accepted the refusal.

"I have only one more question to ask of you, Mr. Ferguson."

"I will answer it if I can."

"Thank you! Who is John Edward Revel?"

"I really don't know."

Paul bowed again. He took up his hat and his stick. He was not smiling any more, and in his eyes there was a look of apprehension. He did not hold out his hand to Mr. Ferguson.

"It will have to be the inquiry agent after all, then," he said. "Good evening."

The lawyer allowed him to reach the door, and then spoke in an altered voice. There was a warm kindliness in it now, and to the youth's anxious and attentive ears a very audible note of commiseration.

"Mr. Ravenel, I want you to give me four days before you set on foot any inquiry. There are others concerned in the matter. I assure you that you will be wise."

Paul shook his head.

"Four days. What shall I do with myself during those four days?"

"You have been very lonely for years," said the lawyer gently. "Four days more, what do they mean?"

"During those years," answered Paul, "I have had the future for my companion. Have I got that companion now?" And Mr. Ferguson was silent.

"I came to your office full of expectation. I have not even now revealed to you the plan I had formed," Paul resumed. "I leave it a prey to a very deep anxiety. That name I mentioned to you, I found written on the fly-leaf of an old manual on infantry drill in my father's bedroom. It was the only old book on his shelf from which the fly-leaf had not been torn out. I am only now beginning to grasp what that may mean." But since Mr. Ferguson had ceased to dispute or pretend, and showed openly a face where distress was joined with good will, the young man cried:

"Still, I'll give you the four days, Mr. Ferguson."

He wrote down the name of his hotel upon a slip of paper and left it on the desk, and shook the lawyer by the hand.

Left alone, Mr. Ferguson sat for a little while in a muse, living again the sweet and bitter scenes of vanished years. To what unhappy ends of death and disgrace had those anxieties and endeavours led? To what futilities the buoyant aspiration? He rang the bell upon his desk, and when his head clerk appeared he said:

"I want a message telephoned to Goring that I shall not get home until eight. Then everyone can go. I have a letter to write which will take a little time."

"Very well, sir," said Gregory, and Mr. Ferguson suddenly slapped his hand down on the table in exasperation.

"Isn't it a curious thing, Gregory?" he exclaimed. "Here's a man takes a world of pains to destroy all traces and records and then keeps by him one book with a name written upon the fly-leaf which brings in a second all his trouble to nothing! But it's always the way. Something's forgotten which you'd think no man in his senses would overlook! Half the miseries in the world, I do believe, come from such omissions."

"And more than half our business," Gregory replied dryly.

Mr. Ferguson broke into a laugh.

" Why, that's true, Gregory," he cried. " And now leave me to my letter ! "

He worded his letter with infinite care, for it was as delicate a piece of work as he had ever been called upon to do, and it took him a full hour. He posted it himself in a pillar-box on his way to Paddington.

CHAPTER II

The Man with the Medals

Though Paul left Mr. Ferguson's office with a calm enough face, his mind was bewildered and fear clutched at his heart. Things were happening to him which he had never imagined at all. He had been confident with all the perfect confidence of eighteen years, and his confidence in a second was gone. He was in real distress, which made him ache like some physical hurt and tortured him at night so that he could not sleep till long after daybreak. He could not adjust himself to the new conditions of his life. He looked with surprise upon other people, in the streets or in the public rooms of his hotel, who were unaware of the troubles which had hold of him.

He had planned his visit to London full with many a pilgrimage. The London of Dickens and De Quincey —its Inns, its gardens and churches! That old mansion at the north-west corner of Greek Street, where Mr. Brunell had given a lodging, and a bundle of law papers for a pillow, to his youthful client—all were to be visited with a thrill ef excitement and a hope that they would not fall short of the images he had made of them in his thoughts. But the glamour had faded from all these designs. He paced the streets, and indeed all day, but it was to get through

the long dismal hours, and he walked like one in a maze.

He knew no one, and throughout the four days no one spoke to him at all. He moved through crowded thoroughfares unnoticed as a wraith; he sat apart in restaurants; and as his father had done, he tramped by night the hollow-sounding streets of the City where the lamp-posts kept their sentry guard.

At last the expected letter came from Mr. Ferguson.

If you will travel to Pulborough, in Sussex, by the 3.55 p.m. train from Victoria on the day you receive this, Colonel Vanderfelt will send a car to meet you at the station and will put you up for the night. Will you please send a telegram to him?

And the Colonel's address followed.

Paul sent off his telegram at once, and followed it in the afternoon. Outside Pulborough station a small grey car was waiting, and a girl of his own age, with brown eyes and a fresh, pretty face, and a small bright blue hat sitting tightly on her curls, was at the wheel.

"I am Phyllis Vanderfelt," she explained. "My father asked me to drive in and fetch you. He has had to be away to-day, and won't get home much before dinner-time, I'm afraid."

She turned the car and drove westwards under the railway arch, talking rather quickly, as people who are uneasy and dread an awkward silence will do. They passed through a little town of narrow winding streets and high walls clustered under a great church with a leaping spire, like a piece of old France, and swung

out on to a high wide road which dipped and rose, with the great ridge of the South Downs sweeping from Chanctonbury Ring to Hampshire on their left, forests and bush-strewn slopes of emerald and cliffs of chalk silver white in the sun, and from end to end of the high rolling barrier the swift shadows of the clouds flitting like great birds.

They had ceased to talk now, and there was no awkwardness in the silence. Paul was leaning forward, gazing about him with a queer look of eagerness upon his face.

"To come home to country like this!" he said in a low voice. "You can't think what it means after months of brown earth and hot skies."

Upon their right a low wall bordered the road, and on the other side of the wall fallow-deer grazed in a park. Beyond, a line of tall oaks, freshly green, was the home of innumerable rooks who strewed the air about the topmost branches, wheeling and cawing. The square tower of a church stood upon a little hill.

"It's friendly, isn't it?" he cried, and a look of commiseration made the eyes of the girl at his side tender. Would he think this countryside so friendly when the evening was over and he had got to his room?

"Do you know our Downs?"

Phyllis spoke at random and hastily as he turned towards her.

"I wonder," he answered. "Could I have forgotten them if I had once known them? I seem to have been within a finger's breadth of recognising something."

"When you have seen my mother we will walk through the village. We shall have time before dinner," said Phyllis, and she turned the car into the carriage-way of a square old house with big windows level with the wall, which stood close to the road.

Mrs. Vanderfelt, a middle-aged woman with shrewd and kindly eyes, received him with a touch of nervousness in her manner and, as her daughter had done, talked volubly and a little at random whilst she was giving him some tea.

"I don't know what you would like to do until dinner-time," she said, and Phyllis said:

"I am going to show Mr. Ravenel the village."

A glance of comprehension was swiftly exchanged between the mother and the daughter, but not so swiftly but that Paul intercepted it.

"You can get the key at Rapley's," said Mrs. Vanderfelt.

The two young people came to four cross-roads, and Paul exclaimed:

"Up the hill to the right, isn't it?"

"Yes."

They mounted the hill, and Paul stopped. He pointed with his stick towards the signboard of an inn built on the high bank above the road.

"Now I know. I lived here once as a child. I always wondered why the Horse Guards had an inn here, and what sort of people they were. I used to imagine that they were half-horse like the centaurs, and I always hoped to see them."

Phyllis Vanderfelt laughed.

"Isn't that like a man? I show you a place as

beautiful as any in England, and the only thing which you have remembered of it from the time when you were four, is the place where you could get a drink."

"Yes, the Horse Guards' Inn," repeated Paul cheerfully. "Let us go on."

But it was now Phyllis who stopped, with a face from which the merriment had gone.

"I don't know," she said indecisively. "It shall be as you wish. But I wonder. We talked it all over at home. We couldn't tell whether it would be helpful to you, whether you would care to remember everything to-morrow—whether you already remembered. My father was quite clear that you should see everything. But I am not sure——"

Paul felt the clutch of fear catching his breath once more as he looked into the girl's compassionate eyes

"I am with your father," he said. "My recollections are too faint. I can only remember what I see. Let us go on."

"Very well."

Phyllis Vanderfelt went into one of the cottages, and came out again with a big key in her hand. Beyond the cottage a thick high hedge led on to an old rose-red house with an oriel window looking down the road from beneath a gable and a tiled roof golden with lichen. Wisteria draped the walls in front with purple.

"It is empty," said Phyllis as she put the key into the lock and opened the door. The rooms were all dismantled, the floors uncarpeted. Paul Ravenel shook his head.

"I remember nothing here."

Phyllis led him through a window into a garden. A group of beech trees sheltered the house from the south-west wind, and beyond the beech trees from a raised lawn their eyes swept over meadows, and a low ridge of black firs, and once more commanded the shining Downs. Paul stood for a little while in silence, whilst Phyllis watched his face. There came upon it a look of perplexity and doubt. He turned back towards the house. On its south side a window had been thrown out; on its tiled roof a wide band of white clematis streamed down like a great scarf. On the wall beside the window a great magnolia climbed.

"Wait a moment," cried Paul, and as he gazed his vision cleared. He saw as the gifted see in a crystal, a scene small and distant and very bright.

There was a table raised up on some sort of stand upon the gravel paths outside this window. A man was sitting at the table, and a small crowd of people, laughing and jeering a little—an unkindly crowd—was gathered about him. And furniture and ornaments were brought out. He turned to Phyllis.

"There was a sale here, ever so long ago—and I was present outside the crowd, looking on. I lived here then?"

"Yes," said Phyllis.

"And it was our furniture which was being sold?"

"Yes."

So far there was no surprise for Paul Ravenel, nothing which conflicted with his conception and estimate of his father. Monsieur Ravenel had sold off his furniture, just as he had changed his name and abode. It was part of the process of destroying all

his associations with the country and people of his birth. Only—his recollections had revealed something new to him—and disquietingly significant.

"Why were those who came to buy unfriendly and contemptuous?" he asked slowly.

"Are you sure that they were?" Phyllis returned. But she did not look at Paul's face, and her voice was a little unsteady.

"I am very sure about that," said Paul. "A woman was with me holding my hand. She led me away—yes, I was frightened by those noisy, jeering people, and she led me away. It was my nurse, I suppose. For my mother was dead."

"Yes," replied Phyllis, and then, not knowing how hard she struck, she added: "Your mother had died a couple of months before the sale."

Paul Ravenel during the last days had been schooling himself to a reserve of manner, but this statement as of a thing well known, which he, too, must be supposed to know, loosened all his armour. A startled cry burst from his lips.

"What's that?" he exclaimed, and with a frightened glance at his white face Phyllis repeated her words.

"I thought you knew," she added.

"No."

Paul walked a little apart. One of the garden paths was bordered by some arches of roses. He stood by them, plucking at one or two of the flowers and seeing none of them at all. The keystone of the explanation which he had built in order to account for and uphold his father was down now, and with it the whole edifice.

It had all depended upon the idea of a passionate, enduring love in his father's heart for the wife who had died in giving birth to her son, the enemy. And in that idea there was no truth at all!

Paul reflected now in bitterness that there never had been any reason why he should have held his belief—any wild outburst from Monsieur Ravenel, any word of tender remembrance. He had got his illusion —yes, he reached the truth now in this old garden— from an instinct to preserve himself from hating that stranger with whom he lived and on whom he depended for his food and the necessities of his life. He turned suddenly back to Phyllis Vanderfelt.

"What I don't understand, Miss Phyllis, is how it is that remembering so much of other things here, I can remember nothing of my mother."

"She only came home here to die," Phyllis replied gently.

Paul pressed his hands over his eyes for a moment or two in a gesture of pain which made the young girl's heart ache for him. But he looked at her calmly afterwards and said:

"I am afraid that Colonel Vanderfelt has very bad news to tell me to-night."

Phyllis Vanderfelt laid her hand gently upon his arm.

"You will remember that you have made very real friends here in a very short time, won't you?" she pleaded. "My mother and myself."

"Thank you," said Paul.

Yet another shock was waiting for him in Colonel Vanderfelt's house. For as he entered the drawing-

room three-quarters of an hour later, a man lifted himself with an effort from an easy chair and with the help of a stick limped across the room towards him.

"This is my husband," said Mrs. Vanderfelt, and before Paul could check his tongue, the cry had sprung from his lips:

"The man with the medals!"

The older man's eyes flashed with a sudden anger. Mrs. Vanderfelt gasped and flushed red. Phyllis took a step forward. All had a look as if they had suffered some bitter and intolerable insult.

Paul quickly explained. "My father and I crossed you one night a long time ago when you were coming from a banquet at the Guildhall. You called to my father. I was a child, and I always remembered you as the man with the medals. The phrase jumped out when I saw you again."

The fire died out of Colonel Vanderfelt's eyes. A look of pity sheathed them.

"We will talk of all these things after dinner," he said gently, and his hand clasped the youth's arm. "Let us go in now."

CHAPTER III

At King's Corner

"Ferguson wrote to me that you mean to return to your own race," said Colonel Vanderfelt when the ladies had withdrawn from the dining-room. He was a small, wiry man, dark of complexion, with a sleek black head of hair in which there was not one visible thread of grey. His face was hardly lined, so that it was not until one looked at his eyes that one got any impression of age. The eyes, however, betrayed him. Deeply sunken and with a queer set appearance, they were the eyes of an old, old man; and they provoked a guess that they had at one time gazed so desperately upon horrors that they could never again quite get free of what they had seen.

"Yes," replied Paul. "Mr. Ferguson was not very sympathetic."

"Then I think he was wrong," said Colonel Vanderfelt heartily. "Philosophers and Labour leaders talk very placidly about throwing down the walls between nation and nation, as if it was an easy morning's work. But the walls aren't of our building. They are mother earth and climate, and were there from the beginning of time. Some people can pass them over, of course—American women especially. But very few men who aren't weaklings. To the men worth anything, their

soil cries, and louder and louder with each year that passes. A glass of port? Help yourself. A cigar? No? The cigarettes are in that Battersea box in front of you. It's a fiction that tobacco spoils the flavour of port. Claret, yes. Port, not a bit."

Colonel Vanderfelt took a cigar from a box upon a side table, lit it and resumed his seat. Paul brought him back to the subject of their talk.

"I am glad to hear you agree with me, Colonel Vanderfelt. I have been more and more convinced since I have sat in this room."

Paul Ravenel looked about the dining-room with its fastidious and sober elegance. Cream walls upon which a few good prints were hung; a bright red screen drawn in front of the door; shapely old furniture with red upholstery, and heavy curtains of red brocaded silk at the one big bow window; a long slender Sheraton sideboard against the wall; a fine Chippendale cabinet in a recess; and this round gleaming table of mahogany with its candlesticks and salt-cellars of Battersea enamel, its silver equipment, and its short, tubby decanters with the blue tinge of old Waterford in the glass—in every aspect of the room grace was so wedded to homeliness that Paul could not but envy its possessors.

"I resume my race, and with it, of course, my name," he said, keenly watching Colonel Vanderfelt.

But Colonel Vanderfelt took his cigar from his lips only to ask a question.

"And then?" he inquired.

"Then I propose to try for a commission in the Army," Paul replied.

"Oh, yes," said Colonel Vanderfelt. "But the Bar offers more opportunities to a young fellow nowadays, doesn't it? Why the Army? There are other professions."

"Not for me, sir!"

Colonel Vanderfelt shrugged his shoulders and stared at the shining table in front of him. It was a devil of a world—everything cross-wise and upside down and unaccommodating. Why must this youth, with money and the world to choose from, choose just the one bunch of grapes quite out of his reach? And set his very heart on it, too. There had been a ring in that "Not for me, sir!" which could not be stilled by argument. It was youth's challenge to the elders; its "I know better," which there was no use in debating.

"Let me hear," said Colonel Vanderfelt; and the lad's ambitions were shyly revealed to him. Histories of campaigns, the lives of great soldiers, books of strategy too technical for him to follow—these had been his favourite reading. It was the actual work of the soldier which had fascinated Paul, not the glitter of the great days of parades and manœuvres, but his daily responsibilities and the command of men and the glory of service. Colonel Vanderfelt listened and nodded, and remembered a phrase in Mr. Ferguson's letter: "The boy's of the right temper." Surely he was, and the whole business was perverse and pitiful! He heard Paul closing his little apologia.

"So you see, sir, from the time when I began to think at all of what I should do in the world, this had always been my wish." The lad was seeking to challenge

and defy, but the anxiety which had tortured him during the last four days turned the challenge into a prayer. He searched Colonel Vanderfelt's face for a sign of agreement. "I know of nothing," he asserted, "of nothing at all which should hinder me from trying to fulfil my wish."

"But I do," replied the other. "I think, Paul, that it would be very difficult for you to take your father's name and seek a commission in the Army here."

Paul's cigarette had gone out whilst he was speaking. He lit it now at one of the candles with trembling fingers. The gentleness of Colonel Vanderfelt's voice made him think of some compassionate judge passing sentence.

"You will, I trust, make that clear to me," he said.

"Of course," replied the Colonel. "I admit to you that up to the last few moments I had hoped to escape, and leave most of the story untold. And had you chosen another profession—why, very likely I should have spared you and myself, too."

But though he had promised to be frank, he was reluctant to begin, and he had ended on so evident a note of discomfort and pain that Paul Ravenel dared not interpose a word. The window stood open upon the garden, and let into the room the perfumes of flowers and the freshness of the dew. Outside was the glamorous twilight of a summer night. It was very still. Occasionally a bird upon a branch set the leaves rustling; and across a field a cuckoo whose voice was breaking called incessantly. Paul was never to forget that background to these moments of suspense. All

the bitterness was not with him on this night. Colonel Vanderfelt was back in the dark places of his life amongst old shames and miseries.

" Your father's name was John Edward Revel," he began, and the boy drew a long breath. " Yes, the infantry manual was his, some relic of the old days that he must keep, I suppose—some one small valueless thing—yes, I think that's natural. He and I were friends. We passed out of Sandhurst together and met again in India. Years afterwards. Service brought us together."

He named an outlying post in the hills to the northwest of Quetta, where John Edward Revel and he lay beleaguered during one of the frontier wars. They were ordered to hold on to their position at all cost and help would come to them.

" We were neither of us youngsters, you must understand, pitchforked into commands we weren't fit for. We had seen a lot of service, and done well—both of us. That makes the matter worse perhaps. All the less excuse ! That's what they did say ! We were losing men all the time, and we hadn't many to begin with. Ammunition was running low, water still lower, we were attacked day and night, we two had no sleep, and the promised relief didn't come. The Baluchis got into our outer court one evening, and we had the greatest trouble to get them out. The same night one of our spies came in with the news that a fresh big force was hurrying to reinforce the Baluchis. We were pretty well at the end of our tether—Revel and I. Something snapped in both of us. We slipped out under cover of darkness, the whole force, and fell back

in spite of our instructions, leaving this key-post unguarded. And the new enemy we fell back from was our own relief expedition which had marched night and day and turned the Baluchis' flank. They found the fort empty, which we had been ordered at all costs to hold. You can guess what happened. We were put under arrest, court-martialled—cashiered! So you can understand, perhaps, now, our queer reception of you in the drawing-room this evening, when you startled us by calling me, 'The man with the medals!' It sounded like some bitter jibe from those bad days."

"But I don't understand," Paul Ravenel stammered. "You were cashiered, both of you, you and my father?"

"Both of us."

"Yet I saw you coming from a dinner at the Guildhall, with your medals upon your breast! You are here in your own home, wearing your rank! How can that be, sir?"

Colonel Vanderfelt replied with a curious accent of apology to his young guest.

"I was lucky. I had served in India longer than your father. I had been more interested; and dialects came to me easily. More than once I had spent my leave living in the bazaars, and as far north as Leh. Therefore it wasn't so difficult for me. I disappeared. I'm a dark man naturally. I grew a beard. I joined a battalion of irregular levies. I served for three years in it on the frontier."

"Did no one guess who you were?"

"I think one or two suspected and—winked. They were busy years, you see. A good deal was going on

all this time, and men who knew anything about soldiering were valuable. Of course, they were pretty rough, hard years for anyone with delicate tastes, but there was so much to be perhaps regained," and Colonel Vanderfelt pulled himself up quickly. " Well, after three years I was wounded rather badly. As you see, I limp to this day. It looked then as if the game was up altogether and I was going out. So I sent a message in my own name to an officer on the border whom I had known. The Governor of the Quetta came up himself to see me in hospital, and the end of it was that my sentence was annulled. There, my boy, that's the whole story."

Colonel Vanderfelt rose from his chair and, limping over to the window, looked out upon that quiet garden, which he had lost and, after such unlovely years, won back again. They were years of which he could never think even now without a shiver of disgust and a cold fear lest by some impossibility they should come again. None, indeed, had ever known the full measure of their abasement and squalor and degradation. Even with the great prize continually held in view, they had been hardly endurable. The chance of winning it had been the chance of a raft to a man drowning in the Pacific. The voice of Paul Ravenel, who was still seated at the table, broke in upon him.

" And that's the whole story, sir ? "

" Yes, Paul."

Paul shook his head.

" The whole story, sir, except that what you did—my father didn't. Therefore he lived and died an

outcast," and the young man's voice died away in a whisper.

Colonel Vanderfelt turned back to him and laid his hand upon Paul's shoulder and shook it in a gentle sympathy.

" There's another question I would like to have answered," said Paul. He was very pale, but his voice was firm again.

" Yes ? "

" The disgrace, I suppose, killed my mother ? "

" I have no right to say that."

" The truth, sir, please ! " and the appeal came so clearly from a man in the extremity of torture, that Colonel Vanderfelt could not but answer it.

" It did. She was in India when this shameful business happened. She came home and died."

In a few minutes Paul began to laugh. The laughter was pitched in a low key and horrible to hear ; and there was such a flame of agony burning in the boy's eyes and so dreadful a grin upon his white face that Colonel Vanderfelt feared for his reason.

" Steady, Paul, steady ! " he said gently.

" I was thinking of the fine myth by which I explained everything to the honour of the family," Paul cried in a bitter voice. " Our seclusion, the antagonism between my father and me, the change of name—it was all due to a morbid grief at the loss of a wife too deeply loved. That's what I believed, sir," he said wildly, but Colonel Vanderfelt had already learned of these delusions from Mr. Ferguson. " And shame's the explanation. Disgrace is the explanation

He killed my mother with it, and now the son, too, must hide!"

"No!" said Colonel Vanderfelt with decision. "There's a good way out of this tangle for you, a way by which you may still reach all you have set your heart on—your career, your name and an honoured place amongst your own people."

Paul lifted incredulous eyes to the other man's face.

"Yes," insisted the old man. "You don't believe me. You young fellows see only the worst and the best, and if the best doesn't tumble into your hands, you are sure at once that there's nothing for you but the worst. Just listen to me!"

Paul took hold upon himself. He was ashamed already of his outburst.

"You are very kind, sir," he said, and some appreciation of the good will which the older man had shown to him in baring his own wounds, and drawing out into the light again old humiliations and guilt long since atoned, pierced even through the youth's sharp consciousness of his own miseries. He rose up from his chair. He was in command of his emotions now, his voice was steady.

"I have been thinking too much of myself and the distress into which this revelation has plunged me," he said, "and too little of your great consideration and kindness. What you have told me, you cannot have said without pain and a good deal of reluctance. I am very grateful. Indeed, I wonder why you ever received me here at all."

"You would have found out the truth without my help."

"That's what I mean," said Paul. "I should have found it out through an inquiry agent, and the news would have been ten times more hideous coming in that way rather than broken gently here. Whilst, on the other hand, you would have spared yourself."

"That's all right," Colonel Vanderfelt answered uncomfortably, and to himself he added: "Yes, old Ferguson wrote the truth. That boy's clean and a gentleman." He pressed Paul down into his chair again.

"Come! Take a glass of this old brandy first—it's not so bad—and then we'll talk your prospects over like the men of the world we both are, eh? Neither making light of serious things nor exaggerating them until we make endeavour useless."

He fetched to the table a couple of big goblets mounted on thin stems within which a delicate spiral had been blown, and poured a liqueur of his best brandy into each.

"I have an idea, Paul. It has been growing all the time we have been talking together. Let's see if it means anything to you."

He held his goblet to his nose and smelt the brandy. "Pretty good, this! Try it, Paul. There's not a cough nor a splutter in it. Well, now," he went on when Paul had taken his advice. "In the first place, you are eighteen?"

"Yes," said Paul.

"And a man of means?"

"Pretty well."

"You have property in Casablanca, in Morocco?"

" Yes, sir," said Paul, wondering whither all these questions were to lead.

" And you lived there for some years ? "

" Yes. Before I went to school in France and my father built his house in Aguilas."

" You know Arabic then ? "

" The Moorish dialect, yes."

" And by nationality you are French ? "

" Yes," answered Paul reluctantly.

" Good ! " said the Colonel, warming to his theme. " Now listen to me. The French must move in Morocco, as we moved in India, as we moved in Egypt. It isn't a question of policies or persons. It's the question of the destiny of a great nation. The instinct of life and self-preservation in a great nation which sooner or later breaks all policies and persons that stand in the way. There'll be the timid ones who'll say no. And there'll be the intriguers who'll treat the question as a pawn to be moved in their own interest. But in the end they won't matter."

Colonel Vanderfelt had a complete contempt for politics and politicians, like most of his calling until they have themselves joined the ranks of the politicians.

" Morocco can't remain as it is—a vast country with a miserable population, misgoverned, if governed at all, with a virgin soil the richest in the world, and within a few miles of Europe. Somebody's got to go in and sort it up. And that someone's got to be France. For she can't afford a possible enemy on her Algerian frontier. Yes, but there'll be trouble before she succeeds in her destiny, trouble and—opportunity."

The Colonel paused to let that word sink into Paul's mind. "Why not be one of those who'll seize it? They are great soldiers, the French. Join them, since that's your way of life. Go through the schools, get your commission in France, and then strive heart and soul to get service in the country whose language you know, the country of opportunity. Then, in God's good time, if you still so wish it, come back here, resume your own name, rejoin your own race!"

Paul Ravenel, from his solitary dreaming life and his age, was inclined to be impressed by thoughts of sacrifice and expiation and atonement. He was therefore already half persuaded by Colonel Vanderfelt's advice. It would be exile, as he had come to think, but it would also be a cleansing of his name, an expiation of his father's crime. And after all, when he looked at the man who gave him this advice, and remembered what he had endured with a hope so infinitesimal, the course proposed to him seemed fortunate and light.

"Thank you," he said. "I should like to think over your idea."

Colonel Vanderfelt was pleased that there had been no flighty, hysterical acceptance, no assumption that the goal was as good as reached.

"Yes, take your time."

Colonel Vanderfelt rose and, removing the shades, blew out the candles upon the dining-table.

"I don't know what you would like to do," he said, turning to the lad. "You will follow your own wish, of course. And if you would rather go straight now to your room, why, we shall all understand."

"Thank you, but I should prefer to join the ladies with you."

Colonel Vanderfelt smiled very pleasantly. The anticipation of Paul's visit had caused him a sleepless night or two and not a little pain. How much should he tell? The question had been troubling him, so that he had more than once sat down to write to Mr. Ferguson that he would not receive the boy at all. He was very glad now that he had, and that he had kept nothing back.

"Come, then," he said.

In the drawing-room Phyllis Vanderfelt sang to that little company some songs of old Herrick in a small, very sweet, clear voice. Paul sat near the long open window. The music, the homely friendliness within the room, and the quiet garden over which slept so restful a peace, were all new to him, and wrought upon him until he felt the tears rising to his eyes. In the high trees of the park upon the far side of the road the owls were calling, and the cuckoo repeated his two notes beyond the field. Paul rose suddenly to his feet.

"That throaty old cuckoo means to make a night of it," he said with a laugh which was meant to hide the break in his voice and did not succeed. He stepped over the threshold and was out of sight.

"Let him be!" said Colonel Vanderfelt, and a little later, when Phyllis had taken herself off to bed:

"I liked him very much," the Colonel said to his wife. "'The right temper,' that's the phrase old Ferguson used. He'll do well, Milly, you'll see. We shall see him home here one day carrying his sheaves,"

and as his wife remained silent he looked at her anxiously. "Don't you agree with me?"

"I don't know," Mrs. Vanderfelt answered slowly. "I hope so with all my heart. But didn't you notice his looks and a sort of grace he has?"

"Well?" asked the Colonel.

"Well, we have left out one consideration altogether. What part are women going to play in his life? A large one. Tom, I have been watching Phyllis to-night. A day or so more, and we should have an aching heart in this house."

"Yes, I see," returned Colonel Vanderfelt. "Women do upset things, don't they?"

"Or get upset," said Mrs. Vanderfelt. "And sometimes both."

CHAPTER IV

Betwixt and Between

Paul Ravenel left Colonel Vanderfelt's house at King's Corner on the next morning in time to catch an early train to London. His friends gathered in the drive to wave him a good-bye as he drove away.

"You'll write to us, won't you?" said Mrs. Vanderfelt.

"And there's a room whenever you have an evening to spare," added the Colonel.

Paul had quite captured the hearts of the small household, and they were hardly less concerned for his future and his success than they would have been had he been their own son.

Paul had given no hint at the breakfast table of his plans, if indeed he had yet formed any, nor did his friends press him with any question. But they waited anxiously for letters, and in time one came with the postmark of St. Germain. Paul had passed into St. Cyr. Others followed with lively enough accounts of his surroundings and companions. Here and there the name of a friend was mentioned, Gerard de Montignac, Paul's senior by a year, for instance, who cropped up more often than anyone else.

They heard later that he had passed out with honours and was now a sub-lieutenant in the 174th Regiment,

stationed at Marseilles ; then a couple of years later, just at the time when Phyllis was married, that he had been seconded to the 2nd Tirailleurs, and was on active service amongst the Beni-Snassen in Algeria. He escaped from that campaign without any hurt, and wrote a little account of it to his friends at King's Corner, with some shrewd pictures of his commanders and brother officers. But the same reticence overspread the pages. Mrs. Vanderfelt was at a loss to recapture out of them a picture of the lad who had stayed one night with them and borne so gallantly the destruction of his boyish illusions. The letters, to her thinking, might have been written by an automaton with a brain.

A few months afterwards Colonel Vanderfelt slammed down his newspaper on the breakfast table.

" That's where Paul ought to be. I told him. You can't blame me. I told him ! "

The long-expected trouble in Morocco was coming to a head. The extravagance and incapacity of the Sultan Abd-el-aziz ; the concession of the Customs to the French ; the jealousies of powerful kaids ; and the queer admixture of contempt and fear with which the tribes watched the encroachments of Europeans—all these elements were setting the country on fire. Already there were rumours of disorder in the wealthy coast town of Casablanca.

" That's where Paul ought to be ! " cried Colonel Vanderfelt angrily. But his anger was appeased in a couple of days. For he received a letter from Paul with the postmark of " Oran," written on shipboard. He and his battalion were on their way to Casablanca.

They arrived after the bombardment and massacres, and served under General d'Amade throughout the campaigns of the Chaiovia. Paul was wounded in the thigh during the attack upon Settat, but was able to rejoin his battalion in a month. He was now a senior lieutenant, and his captain being killed in the fight at McKoun, he commanded his company until the district was finally pacified by the victory over the great kaid and marabout, Ben Nualla. Paul had done well; he was given the *médaille*, and at the age of twenty-six was sure that his temporary rank would be confirmed. He wrote warmly of those days to his friends. There was a note of confidence and elation which Mrs. Vanderfelt had not remarked before, and the letter ended with a short but earnest expression of gratitude to his friends for the help they had given him eight years before.

For the next two years, then, the household at King's Corner read only of the routine of a great camp, described with a lively spirit and an interest in the little trifles of his profession, which was a clear proof to them all that Paul had seen straight and clearly when he had declared: "There's no other profession for me." Thereafter came news which thrilled his audience.

"I am transferred to the General Staff," Paul wrote, "and am leaving here on special service. You must not expect to hear from me for a long while."

Neither Colonel Vanderfelt nor his wife had quite realised how they had counted on Paul's letters, or what a fresh lively interest they brought into their quiet lives, until this warning reached them.

"Of course we can't expect to hear," said Colonel Vanderfelt irritably. "Paul's probably on very important service, and a postmark is quite enough to give a clue. But you women don't understand these things."

Phyllis, the married daughter, and Mrs. Vanderfelt were the women to whom this rebuke was addressed, and neither of them had said a word to provoke it.

"No doubt, dear," Mrs. Vanderfelt replied meekly, with a private smile for Phyllis. "We shall hear in due time."

But the weeks ran into months, the months into a year, and still no letter came. At one moment they wondered whether new associations had not obliterated from Paul's mind his former aspirations; at another whether he still lived. Colonel Vanderfelt ran across Mr. Ferguson towards the end of the year outside his club in Piccadilly, and made inquiries.

"Did you ever hear of that boy Paul Ravenel again?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, he's a rich man now, and I have acted for him," returned Mr. Ferguson. "Since the French occupation, land in and around Casablanca has gone up to fifty times its former value. Ravenel has realised some of it. I have bought the freehold of his father's house close to you, and let it for seven years, and invested a comfortable sum for him in British securities. So I gather that he means to come back in a little while."

Colonel Vanderfelt was relieved upon one score, but it was only to have his anxiety increased upon the other.

"When did you hear from Paul last?" he asked, and Mr. Ferguson answered:

"Some while ago. Let me think. Yes, it must be a year at the least."

Colonel Vanderfelt repeated the conversation to his wife on his return to King's Corner, and both of them shirked the question which was heavy at their hearts.

"It will be pleasant to have him as a neighbour," said Mrs. Vanderfelt.

"Yes," replied the Colonel. "And it might be quite soon. Seven years he has let the house for. And we are getting no younger, are we? The sooner the better, I say!"

Some look upon his wife's face, a droop of her shoulders, made him stop; and it was in a quiet and strangely-altered voice that he began again:

"We are both pretending, Milly, and that's the truth. We are afraid. It would be hard lines if he died before he did what he aimed to do. Yet we have got to face that possibility."

Mrs. Vanderfelt was turning over a plan in her mind.

"I think that it's time we had news of him," she said. "There's a friend he has mentioned several times in his letters. He was with him at St. Cyr and met him again at Casablanca. Gerard de Montignac."

"De Montignac. Yes, that was the fellow's name. I'll write to Casablanca to-night, my dear, on the chance of his still being there."

Colonel Vanderfelt was easier in his mind after he had posted the letter.

" That was a good idea of mine, Milly," he said to his wife. " We shall get some news now."

Captain de Montignac was still in Casablanca, but at the time when Colonel Vanderfelt was writing to him, he was himself just as anxious as the Colonel about the safety of Paul Ravenel.

CHAPTER V

The Villa Iris

"There's not the slightest reason for alarm," Gerard de Montignac declared testily in much the same tone which Colonel Vanderfelt was using to his wife nearly two thousand miles away. De Montignac was dining at the "popote" of his battalion in the permanent camp of Ain Bourdja, outside the walls of Casablanca, and more than once of late Ravenel's long absence had cropped up in the conversation with a good deal of shaking of heads.

"Paul is a serious one," continued Gerard. "Too serious. That is his fault. He will not pack up and return until the last possible observation is taken, the last notes of value written down in his little book. But then he will. I am not afraid for him, no, not the least bit in the world. And who should be, I ask you, if I am not?"

He glanced round the mess, but not one of his companions accepted his challenge. It was not, however, because they shared his confidence. Indeed, everyone was well aware that more than half of it was assumed. They respected a great friendship sealed nearly three years before on the bloody slopes of R'fakha. De Montignac, with his squadron of Chasseurs, had ridden in that desperate charge by

means of which alone the crest of the plateau had been held until the infantry arrived. The charge had been made down a hill-side seamed with tiny gullies invisible until they gaped beneath the horses' feet; and the difficulties of the ground had so split the small force of cavalry that the attack became a series of scattered tourneys, in which each overmatched trooper drove at a group of Moors armed with rifles and many of them mounted. There had been but ten minutes of the unequal fight, but those minutes were long enough for each man who fell wounded to pray with all his soul that the wound might be swift and mortal, and do its work before the mutilating knife flashed across his face.

Gerard de Montignac lay half-way down the slope with a bullet in his shoulder and his thigh pinned to the ground beneath the weight of his grey charger. The Moors were already approaching him when Paul's company of Tirailleurs doubled up to the crest, and Paul recognised the horse. His rescue of his friend was one of twenty such acts done upon that day, but the memory of them all lived and stopped many an argument as it did to-night.

If Gerard de Montignac chose to cry obstinately: "Some day Paul Ravenel will walk in upon us. He is my friend. I know," it was the part of friendliness to acquiesce. There were other topics for dispute, enough in all conscience; such as the new dancing girl who had come that week to Madame Delagrange's bar, the Villa Iris, and about whom young Olivier Praslin was raving at the other end of the table.

Paul Ravenel had slipped quietly away now more

than a year ago in the black gabardine and skull cap of a Jew pedlar, with a few surveying instruments packed in cheap, dirty boxes of white wood hidden amongst his wares on the back of a mule, and a few penny account books in which to jot his notes. He set out to explore the countries of the Beni M'Tir and the Gerouan tribes, to blacken the white space of the map by means of long and perilous journeys. There were no tribes more implacable and fanatical than these; none whose territories at that time were so little known; and since they held the mountain passes and the great forests which border the trade routes from the south and the west to Fez, there were none of whose strongholds and numbers and resources it was more important that the Administration should know.

"A Jew, travelling alone, carrying on a mule such valuable things as needles and reels of thread, matches and safety-pins, and some bales of cloth, will be able to go where even a Moor of another tribe would lose his life," he had declared, and for a long time in vain.

"And what about your notes? How will you make them?" asked the officer of the Affaires Indigènes, to whom, after much persistence, he was referred.

"I have a shorthand. They will take little space. I have a small tent, too. I shall make them at night."

"And if you are caught making them at night?"

"I shall be making up my accounts—that is all."

The Native Department, however, still shook its head. "A Jew will be robbed, no doubt, and probably kicked and cuffed from tent village to tent

village," pleaded Ravenel. "But he will not be killed. He carries useful things."

In the end his persistence had won the day. He had been given a list of a few sure friends, a kaid here and there, on whose good-will he could rely; and once or twice some news of him from one or other of these friends had come in a round-about fashion to the head-quarters of the Administration at Rabat. But the last of these messages were more than six months old, and Paul Ravenel himself was two months overdue.

Gerard de Montignac was gloomily weighing up his friend's chances when a louder burst of laughter came from young Lieutenant Praslin's corner.

"I tell you she is young and she is pretty, and she can dance," Praslin was protesting, quite red in the face with the fervour of his defence.

"And she is at old Delagrange's bar in Casablanca!" cried an officer, laughing. Here at all events was a statement which could be received with incredulity.

"But I am not the only one to say so," exclaimed Praslin.

"Then we must admit that the case is serious," said Commander Marnier very gravely. "Come, let us consider the case of the young lady. Who is this other who agrees with you, my friend?"

Praslin began to stammer. Commandant Marnier of the Zouaves was the heavy gun of the mess, a disillusioned man of forty-five, with a satirical and at times a bitter tongue.

"Who is this other?" he repeated, leaning forward.

"Little Boutreau of the Legion," Praslin answered miserably.

" Name of a name, here is an authority ! " cried the Commandant. " And how old is the little Boutreau ? "

" Twenty-four."

" And where has the little Boutreau been stationed ? "

Young Praslin's voice got smaller and smaller as he replied : " For the last two years on an advanced post upon the Algerian border."

" Where, no doubt, he has had full opportunity of acquiring a delicate taste in the beauty of women," said the Commandant sagely. " I think we can now construct a picture of this houri. She will be fifty if she is a day. In the colour and texture of her skin she will be very like a fig. Not all the kohl in the East will lend a sparkle to her eyes, nor all the red salve freshness to her faded lips. She will wear a red dress with a swaying whaleboned skirt glittering with spangles, and she will tell you that she dined at the Ritz in Paris a fortnight ago."

The description was not inapt, but his voice changed now into a snarl. Commandant Marnier had the ill-humour of men who sit all their lives in the company of their juniors and see themselves overpassed by each in turn.

" The ladies of the Villa Iris ! Have we not all sought our good fortune at their hands ? The poor pilgrims ! Here they have reached the last stage but one in their doleful pilgrimage. Paris, Madrid, Barcelona, Oran, Tangiers, Casablanca, and then up on the supply wagons to the advanced posts of the Legion, from which there is no return ! Francine, Florette, Hortense—oh, the pretty names ! Yes, that's about

all they have left when they reach this fine metropolis of Casablanca—their pretty names ! "

He rose with a contemptuous movement from his chair, and Gerard de Montignac asked carelessly, with a mind far away from the subject :

" And what is the name of this girl ? "

" Marguerite Lambert, an American," replied Praslin, and, close by Gerard, a young lieutenant of Spahis, who had disembarked that morning from Oran, raised himself half out of his chair and sank back again.

" Do you know her, too ? " Gerard asked.

" No ; yet I have danced with her," replied the lieutenant ; and he sat wondering, not so much that Marguerite Lambert had come to Casablanca, as that he had not guessed after that short stay of hers at Oran that it was to Casablanca she must and would come.

Gerard de Montignac moved round the table to Henri Ratenay, an officer of his own regiment who had made the campaign of Chaiovia with him and Ravenel.

" Shall we go to the Villa Iris ? " he said.

Ratenay laughed, and lifted his cap down from a peg.

" What ! Has Praslin fired you ? Let us go."

But outside the long wooden building, with its veranda of boards, Gerard de Montignac stopped. Marguerite Lambert roused no curiosity in him at this moment.

" A man from the Native Department, called Baumann, came from Rabat to-day to see the General. I hear that he has some news of Paul. He returns to Rabat to-morrow, but I was told that I might find

him to-night at the Villa d'Iris. Let us go then! For though I laugh, I am very anxious."

Gerard de Montignac was an officer of a type not rare in the French Army. An aristocrat to his finger-tips, a youth with one foot in the drawing-rooms of the Faubourg and the other in the cafés of Montmartre, and contemptuous of politics, he had turned his back on Paris like so many of his kind and sought a career in the colonial army of France. He kept up a plentiful correspondence with the beautiful ladies of his acquaintanceship, which did him no good with his masters at the War Office. For the ladies would quote his letters at their dinner parties. "What do you think? I had a letter from Gerard to-day. He says that such a mistake was made," etc., etc. But he was not a gossip. He was a student, a soldier with a note book, and more than one little brochure giving a limpid account of a campaign bore witness to his ambition and his zeal. He was twenty-nine at this date, a year and a half older than Paul; gay and unexacting in his pleasures, capable of much endurance and under a gay demeanour rather hard; a good comrade, but a stern enemy; with no liking for games, and not a sportsman at all in the English sense, but a brilliant horseman, a skilled fencer and hard throughout his long, lean body as flesh can be.

Women had not touched him deeply, but he loved to be spoken of amongst them; he was flattered that one woman should envy another because that other received letters from him; if he had a passion at all it was for this country in which he served, and to which he gave gladly his years of youth and his years

of manhood. It was a new thing to him, half problem, half toy, at once a new rib to the frame of France and a jewel to be worthily set. On the one hand, a country which wide motor roads and schools of intensive farming and the conversion of migratory tribes into permanent householders would develop ; on the other, a place of beautiful shrines and exquisite archways and grim old kasbahs with crenellated walls which must be preserved against the encroaching waves of commerce.

In appearance he was thin and long, and without pretension to good looks. His hair was receding a little from his forehead ; and his nose was sharp and gave to his face the suggestion of a sabre ; and he was as careful of his hands and his finger-nails as if he were still living amongst the duchesses. Moreover, he had a great love of Paul Ravenel, and as he looked about him on that hot night of early April his anxiety increased. For the town was thronged with new troops, new companies of sappers, new artillery men. The information from the interior of the country was alarming. The fires of hatred were blazing up against Mulai Hafid, the new Sultan, as they had three years before against Abd-el-Azziz. And for the same reason. He had sold himself and his country to the Christian. Throughout the town there was excitement and unrest. A movement must be made forward, and this time to Fez. Rumour had it that the Sultan was actually beleaguered there. And somewhere out in the wild fierce country Paul Ravenel was wandering.

" Let us hurry ! " said Gerard de Montignac.

The Villa Iris stood in one of the meanest of the alleys to the left of the great landward gate—a dingy,

long, green house with all its windows in the street carefully shuttered and something sinister in its aspect, as though it was the house of dark stories. When de Montignac and Ratenay stopped in front of it not a light was showing, but from somewhere far within there came the tinkle of a piano.

De Montignac pushed open the door and took a step down into a long dark passage.

They advanced for a few feet, and then the door at the other end was thrown open, letting in a glare of lights and a great noise. Someone with the light behind him came towards them. Beyond that he was an officer in uniform they knew nothing of him until they heard his voice.

" So you have come to see for yourself, eh ? " he cried gaily. " But you will do more than see to-night. Such a crowd in there ! " and Praslin went past them.

" What in the world was he talking about ? " asked Gerard.

" Marguerite Lambert, I suppose," replied Ratenay with a laugh. Gerard, for his part, had forgotten all about her. Nor did she dwell at all in his thoughts now. He went vaguely forward and found himself in a grotesque imitation of a Moorish room, cheap tiles of the bathroom kind, pillars carved and painted to mimic the delicate handicraft of Moorish workmen, a blaze of light from unshaded globes, and a long glittering bar behind which Madame Delagrange presided, a red-faced woman cast in so opulent a mould that he who looked at her perspired almost as freely as she did herself. The bar stood against a wall opposite to the door, and between there were rows of little three-

legged iron tables, at which Levantines, clerks, shopkeepers of every nationality, and a few French officers were seated. In front of the tables a few couples gyrated in a melancholy fashion to a fox-trot thumped out upon an old and tortured piano by a complacent Greek. If there could be anything worse on this hot night than the glare of lights and tawdry decorations, it was the heart-rending racket of the piano. But dancers, decorations, piano and glare were all lost upon Gerard de Montignac.

At the side of the bar, wide double doors stood open upon a platform roofed over with a vine; and in that doorway stood the officer of the Native Department of whom he was in search.

"Baumann!" he cried, and crossed the room.

Baumann, a middle-aged, stockish Alsatian, long since settled in Algeria, to whom this bar seemed the very epitome of devil-may-care luxury and pleasure, surveyed the captain of Chasseurs with deference.

"It is gay here," he said with a smile. "Life, my captain, the life of Paris and the boulevards. You want to speak to me? Yes? We shall be quieter here."

He turned back with almost a sigh of regret to the boarded veranda under the vines. To Gerard the veranda was a relief. Here at all events it was cool and dark, and the piano did not thump upon the brain with so exasperating a poignancy. There was a table empty at the end where a couple of steps led down into a dark garden.

"Let us sit here!" said Gerard, and when the three were seated and the drinks ordered from a person of

indefinable nationality dressed up as a Turk, he leaned forward.

"You have news of Paul Ravenel?"

"News? I couldn't say as much as that," replied Baumann. "I was at Mequinez when the thing occurred, before Mequinez had declared for its new patent Pretender. It's five months ago."

Baumann checked his speech and looked over Gerard's shoulder intently into the dark garden. Gerard was sitting by the edge of the veranda, with his face turned eagerly towards Baumann.

"What's the matter?" Gerard asked impatiently.

"Nothing, I think. Nothing really."

But nevertheless Baumann appeared a little uneasy and his eyes still held their gaze in the same direction. Ratenay turned. At first he could see nothing to account for the alertness which had come so swiftly into Baumann's face. Then he made out a black figure sitting or crouching upon the low edge of the veranda some way behind Gerard de Montignac, just in the edge of the lights, and more in shadow than in light. Gerard had not moved by so much as the twitch of a limb. He rapped, however, now upon the iron table with his knuckles.

"Come, Baumann!" he said sharply. "You were at Mequinez five months ago. Well!"

"I had finished my business," Baumann replied hurriedly, but speaking in a lower voice than he had used before. "I was on my way back to Rabat by the plain of the Sebou. You know how the track runs from Mequinez, due north over rolling country, then along the flank of the Zarhoun mountain to a pass?"

" Yes."

" Half-way to the pass stand the Roman ruins of Volubilis."

" Yes."

" But they lie off the track to the right, and close under the mountain, and worse than that, close under the sacred City of Mulai Idris, which is forbidden ground."

Both Ratenay and Gerard de Montignac knew well enough the evil reputation of that inviolate city where the founder of the Moorish Empire had his tomb. A hive of bandits and fanatics lived upon the fame of the tomb, and when the offerings were insufficient made good the balance by murder and highway robbery. No European could pass within the walls of that town, and even to approach them was venturesome.

" I turned off with my small escort," continued Baumann, " to visit those ruins, but even before we reached them we heard a clamour from the walls of the city, far away as it was. And the leader of the escort was very anxious that I should not delay amongst those tall broken pillars and huge fallen blocks of stone. So I hurried over my visit, but even then, half-way between us and the track, a line of men armed, and some of them mounted, sprang up from the bushes of asphodel and barred our return."

" We shall have to unlock and scour that city one of these months," said Gerard de Montignac, little thinking that it was he upon whom in after years the duty would fall, or what strange and tragic revelations would be made to him upon that day.

" When they saw that we were soldiers they let us pass with a few curses; that is, all of them except one, a young fellow in a ragged djellaba, armed with a great pole. ' What are you doing in our country, you dog of a Christian ? ' he screamed at me in a fury, and he twirled his staff suddenly about his head. He was so near to me that he could have broken my back with it before I could have raised a hand to defend myself. I had just time to understand my danger, and then he grounded his staff and laughed at me. His friends grinned, too. I expect that I did look rather a fool. I was thoroughly frightened, I can tell you. The whole thing had happened so suddenly. I almost felt my spine snapping," and Baumann wiped his face with his handkerchief at the recollection of that great staff whirling in the air and himself helpless upon his horse with his holsters strapped. " So that until we had passed them and were back upon the track again, I didn't understand."

" Understand what ? " asked Gerard de Montignac.

" Understand who had played this joke upon me," returned Baumann. " It was Captain Ravenel."

Gerard de Montignac was startled.

" You are sure ? " he cried. " He was there in Mulai Idris, one of them ! " and Baumann suddenly exclaimed—

" Hush ! Don't turn round. There's a man behind you. He has been creeping along the edge of the veranda. This town is full of spies."

Gerard did not turn, but Ratenay, from where he sat, could see. The black figure crouching well away behind them on the edge of the raised floor had slipped

quietly towards them whilst Baumann had been telling his story. He was now close behind Gerard, squatting low upon the plank, with his feet in the garden, a ragged and dusty Jew, with a mass of greasy ringlets struggling from beneath his skull cap.

Gerard de Montignac turned swiftly round upon him.

" What do you want here ? " he cried angrily.

" A whisky and soda ! " replied Paul Ravenel. For that, once insular, drink had become lately known with favour to the officers of France.

CHAPTER VI

The Order

Paul Ravenel reported to the General and then betook himself to the house by the sea-wall in which he had spent so much of his boyhood. He had a month's furlough, and an account of his wanderings to write. At the end of a week he had got the stain from his skin and the dye out of his hair, but he had not got far with his report, not liking the look of the words as he wrote them down, and composing the page again, to find it no better done than it had been before. He was sitting despondently at his writing-table at ten o'clock on one of these evenings, his hair all rumpled and a chaos of notes spread about him, when Gerard de Montignac burst into the room.

"Paul, I am worn to a shadow with sheer idleness," he cried. "Always something is going to happen, never anything does happen; except ships and ships and ships, and batteries landing and soldiers marching to God knows where. I can bear no more of it. We will break out to-night, Paul. We will drink Casablanca in one draught. We will do something wild and utterly original."

Paul looked up and laughed.

"For instance?"

" Yes, it is rather difficult. To begin with we might go to the Villa Iris."

" That bouge ? "

" And we might dance with Marguerite Lambert, the American ? "

Paul stared.

" And who the devil is Marguerite Lambert ? " he asked. Could any good thing come out of the Villa Iris ?

" It is high time that you knew her," said Gerard de Montignac decidedly.

" What is she like ? "

" I haven't seen her either. But the little Praslin says she's a dream, and the little Boutreau—Boutreau of the Legion—can't sleep at night for thinking of her. It is high time, Paul, that we both made her acquaintance."

Paul laughed and shook his head.

" I daren't risk catching the little Boutreau's malady until I have finished my report."

" You have a month."

" I know. I want to go back to my battalion and command my company," he said. " Some day we are going to march to Fez. Don't forget it ! "

Gerard de Montignac sat down, took off his cap, lit a cigarette, and drew up his chair to the table.

" You are a serious one," he said very sagely, " a fastidious, serious one. When you look at me I feel that you are very sorry for me—that poor Gerard—and that you know I can't help it. And when there are generals about, I point to you and say loudly : ' Ah, there is a serious one who will go far ! ' But

here privately I am afraid for you, Paul. I say to myself, 'He is not of stone. Some day things will happen with that serious one, and where we common people scrape our shins, he will break his neck. When we amuse ourselves for a month he will marry the sergeant-major's daughter."

Paul had heard this homily a good many times before. He just went on writing as if his friend was not in the room.

"But I am not sure that something has not already happened to you—oh, a long time ago."

Paul's pen stopped abruptly, but he did not look up from the page.

"Why are you not sure?" he asked.

"Because you have compassions and sympathies, and little delicacies of thought which the rest of us have not. The garrisons of the Colonial army and the coast towns of North Africa are not the natural soil for such harvests. Some long time ago, a thing has happened, eh?"

"No," said Paul. He gathered his papers together and got up. Gerard was beginning to guess a little too shrewdly. "But I will tell you what is going to happen. I am going with you to the Villa Iris."

The nine years which had passed since Paul had listened through an evening to Colonel Vanderfelt had written less upon his face than on his character. He hardly looked older, nor had he lost the elusive grace which made others warm to him from the outset of acquaintanceship. But he had now the ease, the restful quality of a man who has found himself. Youth which is solitary is given to luxuriate in woe, but the

years of companionship, of friendly rivalry, of strenuous effort, and a little trifle of achievement, had enabled Paul Ravenel to contemplate the blot upon his name with a much less tragical eye than when it had first been revealed to him.

He had hurried from Colonel Vanderfelt's house to France, and for a week had roamed the woods of Fontainebleau sunk in such an exaggeration of shame that he shunned all speech and company and felt himself a leper. Paul remembered that week now with amazement and scorn. He had served throughout the Chaiovia campaign, from the capture of Settat right on to the wonderful three weeks in March when, with the speed and mobility of Stonewall Jackson's "foot cavalry," they had marched and fought and straightway marched again until the swift pounce upon the great camp of Bou Nuallah had put the seal upon their victories. Settat, M'Kown, Sidi el Mekhi, the R'Fakha, the M'Karto—those had been royal days of friendship and battle and endurance, and the memory of the week at Fontainebleau could only live in shame beside them.

Gerard de Montignac's careless words had suddenly set Paul upon this train of thought, so that he forgot for a moment his friend's presence in the room. He had not changed his plans—he found himself putting that question silently. No, he still meant to go back to his own home and race and name. He was not of those to whom Eastern lands and Eastern climes make so searching an appeal that they can never afterwards be happy anywhere else. He was a true child of the grey skies, and he meant in due time to live under

them. But the actual date for that migration had been pushed off to a misty day. He put his cap on his head.

"Come, let us sample your Villa Iris," he said, and the two friends walked across Casablanca to the green, dark-shuttered house.

The bar was full, and the piano doing its worst. Above the babel of voices every harsh note of it hurt like a tap upon a live brain.

Paul and Gerard de Montignac were the only two in uniform there that night. A few minor officials of the French business companies, Greeks, Italians, nondescripts from the Levant, and Jews who three years before, paddling barefoot in the filth of their *mellahs*, were the only people to shout "Vive la France!" as the troops marched through Casablanca. These made up the company of the Villa Iris.

Gerard de Montignac looked about the room. At a big table at the end a little crowd of these revellers, dandies in broadcloth and yellow buttoned boots, were raising a din as they drank, some standing and gesticulating, others perched on high stools, and all talking at the top of their high, shrill voices. Half a dozen women, in bedraggled costumes covered with spangles which had once done duty in the outlying music halls of Paris, were dancing with their partners in front of the tables. But Gerard could not believe that any one of them could have cost even little Boutreau of the Legion five minutes of his ordinary of sleep.

"She may be outside," said Gerard. "Let us see!"

He made his way between the tables, crossed the open space of floor, and went out through the wide doorway on to the big veranda. Paul followed him. The veranda was almost empty. They sat down at one of the small iron tables near to the garden, and Gerard de Montignac broke into a laugh as he noticed his friend's troubled face.

" You cannot bear it, eh ? It is all the vulgar and noisy and crude. You are sorry for us who are amused by it."

Paul laughed, and his face cleared.

" Don't be an idiot, Gerard. It isn't that."

" What's the matter, then ? "

The look of perplexity returned to Ravenel's eyes.

" I have seen her," he said.

" Seen whom ? " asked Gerard.

" Your Marguerite Lambert. At least I think so. It must have been she."

There was a real note of distress in Paul's voice which Gerard de Montignac was quite at a loss to understand. He turned in his chair and looked into the saloon. Between the doorway and the tables a few couples were revolving, but the women were of the type native to such places, their countenances plastered with paint, a fixed smile upon their lips, and a deliberate archness in their expression, and in their features the haggard remains of what even at its bloom so many years ago could have been no more than a vulgar comeliness.

" She is sitting at the big table with those half-drunken Levantines," said Paul. " What is she doing amongst them ? " He asked the question in a voice

of bewilderment and pity. " Why is she here at all—a child ! "

Suddenly the hard uproar of the piano ceased, the dancers stopped their gyrations with the abruptness of mechanical figures whose works have run down, and sauntered to their chairs. Gerard could now see the big table, but there was such a cluster of men about it, gesticulating and shouting, that Gerard de Montignac was moved to disgust.

" It is for those men we fight and get killed," he cried, turning towards Paul. " Look at them ! Three years ago they were cringing in the *mellahs* or shivering in their little shops and offices for fear of an attack upon the city. Now they are the bloods of the town, picking up the money all day, and living the Life at night. Another three years and half of them will have their automobiles and take supper at the Café de Paris, whilst you and I, Paul, if we are lucky, will be shaking with fever in some garrison in the desert. I should like to bang their noisy heads together."

Paul laughed at his friend's indignation.

" All wars fatten the carrion birds, but it isn't for the carrion birds that they are fought," he said, and in the saloon all the voices ceased.

Gerard de Montignac swung round again in his chair. The men who had been standing about the big table had taken their seats, and on the far side of it, almost facing the doorway and the two officers beyond in the dark of the veranda, a girl was standing. Gerard uttered a little cry, so startled was he by her aspect, by the sharp contrast between her delicacy and the squalor of her company. He heard Paul Ravenel

move behind him, but he did not turn ; his eyes were drawn to that slight figure and held by it.

" Marguerite Lambert," he whispered to himself. There she stood, looking straight out through the doorway towards them. Could she see them? he wondered. Why was she standing there in view before that crowd, in this dustbin of Casablanca ? It was wrong.

The piano sounded a note and Marguerite Lambert began to sing. But she could not sing—that was evident from the first bar. A tiny voice, which even in that silence hardly reached to the two men on the veranda, clear and gentle, but with no range of music in it. As singing it was ridiculous. Yet Gerard de Montignac neither laughed nor could withdraw his eyes. He even held his breath, and of her singing he was altogether unaware.

She was pretty—yes, but too thin, and with eyes unnaturally large for her face. She was fresh—yes, strangely fresh for that place of squalor and withered flowers. And she was young, so that she stood apart from the other women like a jewel amongst pebbles. But it was not her beauty which arrested him, nor some indefinable air of good breeding which she had, but—and when she was half-way through her little song Gerard reached the explanation in his analysis—but a queer look of fatality. Yes, a fatal look, as though she was predestined to something out of the common, greater joys perhaps, or greater sufferings, a bigger destiny than falls to the ordinary lot.

Gerard had all the Frenchman's passion for classing

people in their proper categories, and all his knack of losing all interest in them as soon as that was done. He was unable to place the girl in hers.

What was she singing about in that absurd little tinkling voice? Moonlight, and lovers and lilies on the water? to a lot of degenerate, money-grubbing Levantines? Through Gerard's memory, to the tune which she sang, was running a chain of names—names of places—names which Commandant Marnier had savagely strung together one night in the mess; the names of the stages in that melancholy pilgrimage from which women do not return. Paris, Madrid, Barcelona, Toulon, Marseilles, Oran, Tangier, Casablanca, and the advanced posts of the Legion. Yes, but the pilgrimage occupied a lifetime. What was this girl's age? Was she nineteen or twenty? Not more, assuredly! How, then, had she come to the penultimate stage so soon? By what desperate circumstance of crime or ill-fortune? . . .

The song ceased, and at once the clatter of voices broke out again. Madame Delagrange behind her bar poured out the drinks for three or four dark-skinned waiters dressed like Turks, and a painted woman with worn eyes, and wrinkles which no paint could hide, minced out in her shabby high-heeled dancing slippers to the officers on the veranda.

"Give me something to drink, dearie—I am dying of thirst," she said, and she drew a chair to their table. Gerard de Montignac laughed brutally, and would have driven her away, but Paul was quick to anticipate

him. He had seen the woman flush under her paint when Gerard laughed.

"Of course," he said at once. "What shall we all drink, mademoiselle?"

She turned to him gratefully.

"If you will take my advice, the whisky. The champagne—oh, never."

"I can imagine it," said Paul. "Chiefly sugar and sulphuric acid, and mixed in the back yard," and he laughed pleasantly to put the woman at her ease.

The one sure gain which had come to Paul from the destruction of his illusions was a hesitation in passing judgments upon people and estimating their values and characters. He had been so utterly mistaken once. He meant to go gently thereafter. And partly for that reason, partly because of an imagination which made him always want to stand behind the eyes of others and see how different were the things they looked out upon from the things which he saw himself, there had grown up within him that compassion and sympathy which Gerard de Montignac had noticed as dangerous qualities.

So, although in truth he was more impatient than Gerard that this woman should be gone, he betrayed no sign of it. She had surely humiliations enough each day, without his adding yet another. Accordingly they sat about the table, and the woman began with the usual gambit of her class in the only game which she knew how to play.

"I have not seen you here before. You have just arrived in Casablanca? I, too—a few days ago. My

name is Henriette. Only to think that a fortnight ago I was dining in the Café de Paris! But I wanted a change—so fatiguing, Paris!—and to pay my expenses meanwhile. So I dance here for a few weeks and return."

Paul accepted the outrageous lie with a fine courtesy which was lost upon his friend, who for his part grinned openly, remembering the Commandant Marnier's descriptions.

"And what is that little one Marguerite Lambert, at her age, and with her looks, doing here at the Villa Iris?" he asked bluntly.

Henriette flushed, and her eyes grew as hard as buttons. "And why shouldn't she be here?" she asked with a resentful challenge. "Just like the rest of us! Or do you think her so different, as those idiots do over at the table there? But I will tell you one thing," and she nodded her head emphatically, "she will not be here long—no, nor anywhere else, the little fool! But there——!" Henriette's anger died away as quickly as it had flared up. "She is not a bad sort, and quite friendly with us girls."

"And why will she not stay here long?" asked Gerard.

"Oh, ask her yourself, if you are so curious," she cried impatiently. "But you are dull, you two! No, you are not amusing me at all," and emptying her glass Henriette flung off into the saloon as the accompanist began once more to belabour the keys of the piano.

Gerard watched her go with a shrug of the shoulders and a laugh. He turned then towards Paul, and

Paul's chair was empty. Paul had risen the moment Henriette had flung away, and was walking at the back of the tables towards the doorway into the bar. Gerard watched him curiously, and with a certain malicious amusement. Was he, too—that serious one—to go at last the way of all flesh? To seek the conventional compensation for a long period of strenuous service in the facile amours of the coast towns?

The beginning of the affair at all events was not conventional. Gerard noticed with a curious envy which he had not thought to feel, that Paul Ravenel went quietly to the back of that noisy table in the bar, and stood just behind Marguerite Lambert. No one at the table noticed him, nor did Marguerite turn. But she rose slowly to her feet like a person in a dream. Only then did the men drinking at the table look toward Paul Ravenel. A strange silence fell upon them as Marguerite turned about and went towards Paul. For a moment they stood facing one another. Then Marguerite fell in at his side, as though an order had been given, and they moved away from the group at the table, slowly, like people alone, quite alone in an empty world. And no word had been spoken by either of them to the other, nor did either of them smile; and their hands did not touch. But as they reached the open floor where a few were dancing, Marguerite glanced quickly and, to Gerard's fancy, with fear at the fat woman behind the bar; and then she spoke. There was no doubt what she was saying.

"We had better dance for a few moments."

Paul took her in his arms, and they danced. Gerard de Montignac rose and went out of the Villa Iris. The picture of the meeting between those two was still vivid before his eyes. It was as though an order had been given and both, without haste or question, had perfectly obeyed it.

CHAPTER VII

The Pilgrimage

When they reached the wide doorway they slipped out on to the balcony. It was cool here and quiet, and there was no light except that which came from the bar. They sat down at a table apart from the others and close to the garden. A waiter followed them out quickly and looked at Marguerite for an order.

"May I have a citronade?" she asked of Paul, and he replied:

"Let me order for you, will you? A little supper and some red wine. You are hungry."

Marguerite looked at him swiftly, and dropped her eyes.

"Yes, I am hungry," she said, and a smile slowly trembled about her lips and then lit up her whole face. "I have never admitted it before."

The hollows of her shoulders, the unnaturally bright, large eyes burning in her thin face, and an air of lassitude she had, told a story of starvation clearly enough. But the visitors at the Villa Iris had not the compassion or the interest to read it, and Marguerite, for her own reasons, had always been at pains that it should not be read at all. Now, however, she smiled, glad of Paul's care, glad that he had seen at once with

such keen, sure eyes one of the things which were amiss with her. Paul ordered some chicken and a salad.

" But the waiter will be quick, won't he ? " she urged. " Madame is not very content if we are idle."

Paul laughed.

" I'll speak to her," he said lightly. " I'll tell her that she is not to worry you to-night."

He rose half out of his chair, meaning to buy an evening of rest for Marguerite Lambert from the old harridan behind the bar. A bottle of champagne would no doubt be the price, and there was no compulsion upon them to drink it. But he was not yet upon his feet when the girl reached out her hand and caught his sleeve.

" No ! Please ! " she cried with a vehemence which quite startled him. " If she sends for me, I have got to go, and you mustn't say a word. Promise me ! "

She was in terror. Even now her eyes glanced affrightedly towards the open doorway, already expecting the appearance of her mistress. To the enigmas which the girl's presence at all in the Villa Iris proposed to Paul Ravenel, here was another added. Why should she be so terrified of that red-faced, bustling woman behind the bar ? After all, Marguerite Lambert—the only delicate and fresh and young girl who had danced there for a living—must mean custom to Madame Delagrange ; must be therefore a personage to be considered, not a mere slave to be terrified and driven. Why then ? How then ? And his blood was hot at the mere thought of Marguerite's terror and subjection.

But he showed nothing of his anger, nothing of his

perplexity, in his face. He was at pains to reassure her. Let him not add to her fears and troubles.

" I promise, Marguerite," he said. " But let's hope she doesn't notice your absence."

Once more she smiled, her face a flame of tenderness.

" You called me by my name."

He repeated it, dwelling upon its syllables.

" It's a beautiful name," he said.

" Perhaps, as you speak it," she answered with a laugh. " But wait till you hear how harsh a word Madame can make of it."

The waiter brought the supper and laid it on the table between them.

" Eat and drink first," said Paul Ravenel as he poured the red wine into her glass. " Then we will talk."

" You shall tell me your name before I begin."

" Paul--Paul Ravenel," said he, and she repeated the name once with her big, serious eyes fixed upon him, and a second time with a little grimace which wrinkled up her nose and gave to her whole face a flash of gaiety. She drew her chair to the table with an anticipation and relish which filled Paul with pity and tugged sharply at the strings of his heart. She ate her supper with enjoyment and daintiness.

" A cigarette ? " said Paul, offering her his case as soon as she had finished.

" Thank you. Oh, but I was hungry ! "

She lit it and, leaning back in her chair, smoked whilst the waiter cleared the supper away and set the bottle and the glasses between them on the table.

Then Marguerite leaned forward, her face between her hands, her elbows on the table.

" Paul ! " she said with a smile, as if the name was a fruit and delightful to taste.

" I saw you," she continued in a low voice, " when you first came into the room, you and your friend. I thought at once—yes, even then—that you would come for me as you did. I called to you—oh, with all my strength—quietly, to myself. But I called so earnestly that I was afraid that I had cried my little prayer out aloud. And then when I lost sight of you out here in the dark, I was afraid. I didn't see you come in again. I only knew suddenly that you were standing behind me."

Paul Ravenel watched her as she spoke, her great eyes shining, her face delicately white in that dim light. He had no doubt that she spoke in all frankness and simplicity the truth. Were they not once more alone, shut off by a wall of dreams from all the world ? Paul leaned forward and took her hand.

" I did not need to hear you call, Marguerite. I saw you, too, at once. My friend had heard of you, was looking for you. I saw you. I told him where you were." And for a moment the girl's face clouded over and the spell was broken.

So far Paul Ravenel had spoken in French. Now he asked in English :

" Why do they call you the American ? "

Marguerite Lambert stared at him with her eyes opened wide.

" You, too ? "

" Yes. We are of the same race."

She looked at his uniform.

" My mother was French, my father English. He took my mother's nationality," he said.

Marguerite suddenly stretched both her hands across the table to him in a swift abandonment.

" I am glad," she said. " I come from Devonshire."

" I from Sussex."

" I from the county of broad moors and little valleys. You from——" and some look upon his face checked her suddenly. " I have said something that hurts ? " she asked remorsefully.

" No," answered Paul, and for a few moments they were silent. To both of them this revelation that they were of the same race was no longer so much of a surprise as a portent. They were like travellers not quite sure that their feet were on their due appointed road, who come upon a signpost and know that they have made no mistake. These two had no doubt that they were upon their road of destiny, that this swift, unexpected friendship would lead them together into new countries where their lives would be fulfilled. " Just to imagine if I had never come to the Villa Iris ! " Paul exclaimed with a gasp of fear ; so near he had been to not coming. But Marguerite's eyelids drooped over her eyes and a look of doubt and sadness shadowed her face. Exaltations and hopes—here were bright things she dared hardly look upon, for if she once looked and took them to her heart, and found them false, what was merely grievous would no longer be endurable.

" It is a long way from Devonshire to Casablanca," cried Paul, and Marguerite smiled.

" There's a question very prettily put," said she.

Her story was ordinary enough in its essentials. " Some families go up," she said simply. " Others seem doomed to go right down and bring every member of them down too. Most English villages have an example, I think. Once, and not so long ago, they were well off and lived in their farm-house. Now every descendant is a labourer in a cottage, except one or two perhaps who have emigrated and fared no better abroad. The Lamberts were like that."

Marguerite had been born when the family were more than half-way down the hill, although outwardly it still showed prosperous. Her father, a widower, spent more of his time upon racecourses than upon his farm, and made it a point of pride to educate his children in the fashionable and expensive schools.

" He was the most happy-go-lucky man that ever lived," said Marguerite. " We knew nothing of the debts or the mortgages. He was all for being a gentleman, and to be a gentleman, in his definition, was to spend money. He came down to breakfast one morning—there were the four of us at home, my brother, my two sisters and myself—and said cheerily : ' Well, girls, all the money's gone and the farm too.' Then he ate his breakfast cheerily, went upstairs, and blew out his brains with his shot-gun, I suppose quite cheerily too."

The catastrophe had happened a little more than two years before, when Marguerite was between seventeen and eighteen. Misfortune scatters a family as a wind autumn leaves. The brother, a small replica of his father, departed for the Argentine, cheerily confident

of rebuilding by an opportune speculation the Lambert fortune ; the eldest of the sisters married an unsuccessful farmer in the neighbourhood with whom she was in love ; the second became a private secretary, lost her job within the week, and discovered her proper sphere of work as a pretty waitress in a tea-shop. Marguerite herself secured an engagement in the chorus of a musical comedy company which was touring the provinces.

" We were just ordinary girls," Marguerite continued, " rather fecklessly brought up, fairly good-looking, decent manners, but nothing outstanding. There wasn't any Edna May amongst us. We just did what we could, not very well." Marguerite suddenly broke into a delicious laugh. " You heard me sing, didn't you ? Pathetic, wasn't it ? At least it would have been if I hadn't felt the humour of it all the while. Well, we got stranded in Wigan—I am speaking of my musical comedy company—pawned a few things, and travelled to London. Three of the chorus girls and I clubbed together and got lodgings in Bloomsbury. But it was October, when most of the touring companies had already gone out and fresh engagements were only probable for the Christmas pantomime. One after another of my companions dropped away. Finally, I was offered an opening in a concert party which was to tour the music halls in France. I was to dance between the songs."

" A concert party ! " said Paul. " That sounds doubtful."

Marguerite nodded.

" I was warned against it. The white slave traffic !

But I had to take my risk. And as it happened there wasn't any roguery of that kind. Our concert party was genuine. Only it didn't attract, and at Avignon it came to an end. There seems to me to be a curse on families going downhill. Misfortunes centre upon them. It is as though a decent world wanted to hurry them right down and comfortably out of sight as soon as possible, so that it may no longer feel the shame of them." Marguerite laughed, not so much in bitterness as in submission to a law. " Perhaps it is simply that we who belong to those families don't will hard enough that things should go right."

Paul Ravenel looked sharply at his companion. He had instances within his own knowledge to bear out the shrewdness of her remark. His father and Colonel Vanderfelt ! What difference was there between them, except that one willed hard enough to atone for a crime and the other did not ?

" Yes, I expect that's the truth, if you are started downhill," he said slowly. " And then what did you do ? "

There was a great fear in his heart as to what her answer might be. He was already making excuses—already arguing why should there be one law for the man and another for the woman—and rebelling against the argument. Marguerite did not resolve his fears in her account of her miserable little Odyssey, nor, on the other hand, did she increase them.

" I had enough money to take me to Marseilles. I danced at a café there for a little while. I was told that if I crossed the Mediterranean to Oran . . . I managed to do that and I danced at Oran for a little

while. Then I came on to Casablanca," and she caught her breath and clasped her hands convulsively under the sting of some ever-present terror. "And I am afraid," she whispered.

"Of what?" asked Paul.

"That I shall not stay here long either," she cried on a dreadful note of despair, with her great eyes suddenly full of tears. "Then what shall I do?"

Even as she spoke that question her face changed. Someone was coming out from the bar through the doorway. A smile of convention upon her lips masked her misery.

"I shall have to go now, Paul," she said in a low voice, caressing his name. "I am sorry. And you will let me go as you promised?"

"Yes," said Paul regretfully.

"And you will come here again some evening soon, Paul?" she whispered, with a wistful little smile upon her lips.

"I shall wait now."

The smile disappeared at once.

"No. I must dance now. I told you Madame did not like to see me idle. I shall not be able to sit with you again this evening, and we do not close until two or three in the morning, if there is anyone to stay. So to-morrow, perhaps, Paul!"

"To-morrow, Marguerite."

She stood up as a man approached the table. He was a thick-set, stoutish man with a heavy black moustache and a yellowish, shiny face. He was one of those who had been seated at the table in the saloon

with Marguerite when Ravenel and Gerard de Montignac had entered the room. He came up with a frown upon his face, and spoke surlily in French with a harsh, metallic accent.

" We wait a long time for you."

Marguerite Lambert made no rejoinder. " You wish me to dance with you ? " she asked. " I am very happy," and with a smile upon her lips she said good night carelessly to Paul Ravenel. But the appeal and softness of her eyes took the convention out of her smile and the carelessness from her farewell.

Paul, left alone at the table, watched her through the doorway as she danced. Her little plain pink frock was as neat as attention could make it, her shoes and stockings were spotless, her hair, brown with a flicker of copper, parted at the side and with a curiously attractive little peak in the centre of her forehead, was waved smoothly about her small head. His hands had been tingling to stroke it, to feel its silk and warmth rippling beneath his fingers, whilst they had been sitting together on the balcony. There was a slovenliness in the aspect of the other women. Marguerite was orderly as though even amidst the squalor of her environment she kept on respecting herself. She wore no ornaments at all. She was fairly tall, with slim legs and beautiful hands and feet. As he watched her, Paul fell into a cold and bitter rage against the oily moustachioed creature with whom she danced.

" Gerard was right," he said to himself. " We go out and fight, we get ourselves killed and mutilated,

so that such fellows may make money and keep it up all night in the bars. The profiteers! We who are to die salute you!"

Thus he apostrophised the man who had taken Marguerite Lambert away from him, raging furiously. The old prudent Paul Ravenel, counting his steps and avoiding emotions, had for the moment quite disappeared. He was a boy of nineteen, ardent and unreasonable and a little ridiculous in the magniloquence of his thoughts. The only comfort he drew was from an aloofness in Marguerite of which she had shown nothing whilst she sat with him, but which was now very evident. She did not speak whilst she danced, her eyelids were lowered, her face had lost all its expression. Paul had a fancy that she had just left her body to revolve and glide delicately in the dance, while her spirit had withdrawn itself into some untarnished home of its own. The piano suddenly was dumb; the dancers stopped; Marguerite and her partner were standing face to face in front of the doorway. Paul had promised not to interfere. Very well then, he would go. He rose abruptly to his feet, his eyes fixed upon the couple; and at once, though Marguerite never looked his way, she moved sharply. It was a quick little start, hardly perceptible. Paul felt a wave of joy sweep over him. She was conscious of him, as he was conscious of her, so that if he moved abruptly, she at a distance was startled. He turned with a smile upon his lips, but after all he did not go, as he had intended to do. For Henriette came out of the bar towards him.

"Won't you stay for a minute," she said, "and give me something to drink? I am dying of thirst!"

"Of course," he said, and he called to the waiter. He had a great good will towards all women that night, but above all to the women of the Villa Iris.

CHAPTER VIII

Henriette Explains

Paul was rewarded out of all measure for his courtesy. For as Henriette sat and drank her whisky and soda she talked.

" You were civil to me when your friend would have sent me contemptuously away," she said. " And when I told you that I had dined at the Café de Paris only three weeks ago, and your friend laughed, you did not. You pretended that you believed it. That was polite of you. For we both knew that never once in all my life have I dined at the Café de Paris or any such swell restaurant in Paris. And it was kind of you. It made me ready to fancy that I had dined there, and that does one a little good, eh ? One feels better in one's self. So I will be kind in my turn. You are interested in that little one," and she jerked her head towards the table in the bar, where Marguerite had rejoined the noisy group. " Yes, she has chic, and she is pretty on her feet, and she has a personality, but——"

Paul Ravenel leaned forward, his face hardening.

" Mademoiselle, I do not want to hear."

" Oh, I am not going to crab her," replied Henriette, and her petulant temper flamed up. " You think, I suppose, that women cannot admire a girl who is

younger and prettier than themselves and cannot like her? That is foolish. I tell you we all like Marguerite Lambert. And I speak to you for your good and hers. But, of course, if you do not care to hear me——"

"I beg your pardon, mademoiselle," said Paul. "I will listen to you very willingly."

Henriette's passions were no more than bubbles upon the surface of her good humour. They burst very quickly and left no traces. The flush faded from her throat and forehead, and no doubt from the painted cheeks as well, though that could not be discovered by mortal eye.

"Listen!" she said. "Your friend asked me what Marguerite Lambert was doing at the Villa Iris, and I would not answer him. Why should I? It was clear what he meant, wasn't it? Why was she, who might really have dined at the Café de Paris three weeks ago, already here at Casablanca, so near to the end of things?"

Henriette's face grew for a moment haggard with terror as she formulated the problem. The last stage but one of the dreadful pilgrimage of her class! She herself was making that journey, and what lay beyond, and so hideously close, loomed up when she thought of it, and appalled her.

Paul interrupted her with a word of solace.

"You are making too much of his question."

But Henriette would have none of his consolation.

"No, that is what he meant and what you meant, too."

"I said nothing."

"But the question was in your face. The question and a great deal of trouble. Why was Marguerite Lambert already at Casablanca?"

Paul did not contradict her again. She would not believe him if he did, and he might lose the answer to the question.

"You made it still more difficult to understand," he said frankly. There was no good to be gained by beating about the bush with this woman who was disposed to help him. "For though you didn't answer our question, you added to it another perplexity. You said that she wouldn't remain here long."

Henriette nodded.

"That is right. The answer to both questions is the same. She drifted here so soon, and she will stay for so short a time, because she waits for the grand passion. Yes, the little fool!" But it was not in scorn that she styled Marguerite a little fool, but with a half-contemptuous tenderness, and perhaps a tiny spice of envy.

"The grand passion!" Paul repeated, wondering what in the world his companion meant.

"Yes. Oh, she is quite frank with the rest of us. We talk, you know, when we are dressing, and after the café is closed, when we are changing back to our street clothes. Until the grand passion comes, nothing, nothing, nothing to any man Look, they are dancing again, she and Petras Tatarnis, the Greek."

So he was a Greek, the man with the yellow buttoned

boots and the heavy black moustache! Henriette watched them with the eye of a professional.

"Yes, she dances prettily, that little one. But would you like a girl to dance with you just in that way—so unconcerned, so half asleep, so utterly indifferent to you? And if you wanted her as Petras Tatarnis does, furiously, wouldn't you be mad when she swam in your arms so lightly, with so correct a grace and not one look or smile or thought for you? So that if you spoke to her she had to recall her thoughts from the end of the world before she could answer you? You would be wild with rage, eh? You would want to take that slim little white throat between your two big hands and squeeze and squeeze until some attention was paid to you, if it was only the attention of agony and fear. Am I not right?"

Paul's face turned white. He leaned across the table and cried in a low, fierce voice:

"Was that what you meant, Henriette, when you said that she would not be here long? That the Greek would murder her?"

Henriette burst into a laugh.

"Oh, no, no, no, my friend. Petras Tatarnis is not the man to run such perils. He has made much money since the French have come to Casablanca. He is a prudent one. It would have to be a very dark night and a very empty street before Tatarnis risked his beautiful money and all the enjoyment he gets from it; and even then someone else would have to do the work. But he will use other ways."

" What kind of ways ? " asked Paul.

Henriette shrugged her shoulders.

" He is always here. He is rich. Madame Delagrange makes much of him. Very likely he has lent her money, and if so he will want his interest."

" I see."

Paul leaned back in his chair, and Henriette looked at him curiously.

" You were much moved, my friend, when I spoke of the big, coarse hands gripping that little throat."

" Well, any man would be and whoever the woman," he protested, and Henriette smiled her disbelief.

" Would you have been so moved if it had been my throat which you thought to be in danger ? " she asked shrewdly. " No ! Let us be frank. You would have said, ' It is Henriette's business to look after herself. She is old enough, anyway ' ; and you would have forgotten me the next moment." She turned her eyes again upon Marguerite Lambert.

" The grand passion ! Oh, la, la, la ! Until it comes, nothing, oh, but nothing at all for anyone —not half a heartbeat ! But when it does come, everything, at once, with both hands. The folly ! "

" The glorious imprudence ! " replied Paul.

Henriette broke into a harsh laugh as she heard the softly-spoken words and saw the light in Paul Ravenel's eyes. It was the light of a great relief rather than of hope. The fear which had plagued him all through the evening had gone now. There was

no need for the excuses. He had not to argue a defence for Marguerite Lambert.

"The glorious imprudence!" Henriette repeated with a sneer. "Yes, so you say—you the man who has everything to gain from the glorious imprudence, and when he is tired of it can drop it in the road behind him. But I tell you those are not good ideas for a girl who dances for her living in the cafés. There is the patron behind the patron, like Petras Tatarnis, who will make trouble if he doesn't get what he wants, for there are rich patrons whom the patron does not wish to drive away. Or there are jealousies which may mean fighting and the police. No, my fine gentleman! Girls who are difficult, the Villas Iris are no place for them. That is why Marguerite Lambert is dancing in Casablanca and will not dance there long."

"But if the great passion comes?" cried Paul.

"Then it must come quick! Believe me, very quick. Petras Tatarnis is growing troublesome. And if it comes! Shall I tell you what will happen? She will blow her brains out! Oh, you may start in your chair! But look at her where she sits. There is the mark of fate already upon her face. It is written, as they say in this country!"

So to Henriette, as to Gerard de Montignac and to Paul Ravenel, that indefinable look of destiny in Marguerite was evident. Paul asked himself whether it was not simply the outward and visible sign of that passionate self-respect which had kept her untarnished against the rush and play of the great passion when it came. Or was the future really written there—

a history of great joys perhaps and great sorrows certainly to be ?

" So Marguerite lives on seven francs a day and——"

She got no further. Paul interrupted her with an exclamation of horror.

" Seven francs ! "

" Yes. That is what our generous Madame Delagrange pays us each night, and we provide our own dancing kit out of it. Oh, the little fool starves. That is certain—all the more certain because she will not let any of the clients here give her food."

" But she let me," cried Paul, with a smile of pride.

" Yes, she let you to-night. But the others, never, never, lest—you understand ?—lest they should make a claim."

" Out of so small a service ? " asked Paul incredulously.

Henriette smiled.

" You have been lucky in your world," she said. " The clients of the Villa Iris are not so generous. They will make a claim out of anything, as, by the way, most men will, if the claim may get them what they want. So that little one, since she will give herself to none of them, is wise to starve. You are the only one from whom she has taken food. It is curious, eh ? It is because of that and because you treat me like a human being that I, Henriette, who like the little fool, ramble on so seriously to you to-night."

The plastered face softened into tenderness, and the bird-like eyes shone and filled suddenly with tears.

" It is kind of you," said Paul. If anyone had said to him a couple of hours before that he would have felt himself intensely privileged because a little dancing girl of the Villa Iris had taken supper from him and from him alone he would have laughed his informant to scorn. But it was so. Paul was radiant with pride. He saw himself as a very fine fellow, a much finer fellow than he had ever believed himself to be. The loneliness of his boyhood, a sudden blow crushing his pride and his dreams in the dust, and years thereafter informed with a strong purpose to regain his name and his place in his own country, had combined to defer but had not slain his youth. It was back with him now, all the more ardent and dangerous from the restraint which had held it in check. Paul Ravenel was a boy of nineteen on this evening in the fire of his passion, but with the will and the experience of his own years ; and he was old enough to hide any plans which he might be forming and to seek all the knowledge he could get from Henriette.

" Why should she blow out her brains as you say ? " he asked, offering to Henriette a cigarette.

" Because that is what she will do," replied Henriette as she lighted her cigarette. " I know my world. Listen ! My father kept a little eating-house at Rouen, where I saw many types of men. He went bankrupt. I went to dance in Paris. Oh, I was nothing out of the way. I danced in a quadrille at the Casino de Paris for a little time, then at the Bal Tabarin. I

went to Madrid and Barcelona, where I danced at the Lion d'Or, the restaurant which has no doors, for it is open night and day. And in the end I came here. Well, I tell you this. Fine dreams are for rich people. For us, if we are wise, we bury them out of sight the moment they are born. We will not think of them. We will not allow them. The rich have much which makes disappointment bearable. For us—we blow our brains out."

Whilst she spoke she kept darting little swift glances at her companion, as though she was practising on him some trivial diplomacy. She believed, in truth, every word she said. But since her philosophy was not Marguerite's, if this man could give the girl a year or two of happiness, it would be something, at all events. But Paul sat and listened carelessly, and answered not at all.

"See!" she cried. "When you spin the racquet for the choice of courts at the tennis, it is 'rough' or 'smooth,' eh? Well, it is always rough with us, and we lose the choice."

She laughed at her trifle of a joke, and again her eyes glanced at Paul. But the clearer his purpose became to himself, the more impassive grew his face. Long ago he had learnt that lesson of defence. Henriette rose. She, at all events, was openly disappointed.

"So! I have talked to you long enough," she said. The piano began once more its dreadful cacophany. "Ah, Marguerite is dancing with another of that band. He does not matter. You yourself will dance with her again to-night, isn't it so?"

Paul shook his head.

"No," and as he saw Henriette's face cloud over, he added, "she herself bade me keep away."

The cloud passed at once. That was good news. There was an understanding between them, then, already. Henriette beamed.

"I understand that," she said in a whisper, "and I hope you understand it too. Madame Delagrange is not very content that we dance much with the officers. She says they have no money."

Paul laughed. He would have loved to have seen Gerard de Montignac's face if that remark had been made before him and to have heard his reply.

"Not so much certainly as those gentlemen over there whom we have made rich. But enough, Mademoiselle Henriette, to thank a good friend."

For a moment Henriette was puzzled. Then she looked down. Beside her empty glass lay a folded slip of paper. The broad band of purple told her the amount of the bank-note. She leaned forward, and spoke in a whisper.

"A thousand francs! It is a fortune to me! You understand that? I will take it, yes, with a thousand thanks, but it was not to get your money that I spoke to you."

"I never thought it. If I had thought it, your surprise would have proved me wrong."

Henriette gathered the note in the palm of her hand, and making a movement as if to take her handkerchief, slipped it secretly into her bosom. Another thought came to her.

" You are really rich, then ? You could make a little home, a little safe home, where there would be no clients or patrons or starving ? Oh, that would be different ! " she said in a wondering voice. " I take back what I said about the end her grand passion would lead her to." Henriette glanced again towards Marguerite. " She is chic, eh ? She has style, the little one ? An air of good breeding. Whence does it come ? How is it that she has kept it ? " Paul could have answered that question had he wished to. She had kept it because of her immense pride and self-respect ; she had probably got it to keep from the same source. Henriette looked from the girl dancing to the officer at the table.

" A little home, eh ? If it could be ! " she pleaded. Paul gazed at her with a smile upon his lips and in his eyes, but he did not answer her, and she flung away.

" Oh, you are a box with the lid shut ! Good night, monsieur ! "

" Good night, Mademoiselle Henriette ! "

A few moments later Paul Ravenel followed Henriette into the bar. He stopped before the counter where Madame Delagrange was vigorously wiping the wet rings made by the bottoms of the glasses from the light polished wood. She had always the duster in her hand, except when she was measuring out her drinks into the glasses, and very often then, and generally was at work with it."

" This is quite Maxim's, madame," he said.

The flattery had little effect. Madame barely paused in her polishing and smiled sourly.

"In that case I must see about raising my prices, monsieur," said she. No, clearly she did not like the officers. Paul went on to the door. Marguerite, seated with the Levantines, never looked at him, but just as he was going out she raised her glass to her lips with a little nod of her head, as though she drank a health to some absent friend, and her slow smile dawned and trembled on her lips.

But the night was not yet over for Paul Ravenel. As he reached his house he heard his name called aloud, and turning about saw his friend, Gerard de Montignac, hurrying towards him.

"There is news at last!" he said.

The town had been full of rumours for many days. Certain things were known. It was certain, for instance, that the tribes of the Beni-M'Tir, the Ait-Youssi, and the Gerouan had actually pitched their tents on the plain of Fez, and in full revolt against Mulai Hafid, the Sultan, were pressing the city close. It was known, too, that a flying column, purposely small, in order to set at rest the distrust of the German Press and the opposition of politicians in Paris, had been assembled at Kenitra for a swift march to relieve the capital. This had been delayed by bad weather, which had turned the flat country beyond Kenitra into a marsh.

But there had been for days a continual disembarkation of fresh troops at Casablanca, which pointed to operations on a wider scale. On this night the truth was out.

"Come into the house and let me hear, Gerard,"

said Paul, and opening his door he switched on the electric lights and led Gerard into a room.

" Meknes has risen, too. A new Sultan, Mulai Zine, the brother of Mulai Hafid, has been proclaimed Sultan there. It is no longer to be a flying column which will camp for the few days under the walls of Fez and return. It is to be a great expedition. The whole camp at Ain-Bourdja is ringing with it to-night. I ran down to tell you."

" That was good of you, Gerard," said Paul.

There was a great contrast visible now between the two officers, the one excited and eager, the other playing with the switch of the standard lamp upon his table, and lost in thought.

" I hear that my squadron is to go up in the first column under Colonel Brulard. You, of course, with your battalion, will be wanted too."

" I suppose so," replied Paul slowly. " I should have liked to have finished this report before I go."

" The report can wait," said Gerard. " France can't."

The two friends talked late into the night. Paul gradually threw off the reticence with which he had at first answered de Montignac. They fell to debating the strength of the different columns, the line of march, whether through the forest of Zemmour or over the plain of the Sebou and by the Col of Segota, and who would command.

" Brulard for the advance force," said Gerard. " The General himself will follow."

" And Gouraud ? " asked Paul.

" Yes, yes, Gouraud. He couldn't be left behind.

It is said that he will have the supply column and follow a day or two behind Brulard."

"We shall know more about it to-morrow," said Paul, and Gerard looked at his watch.

"Do you know the time?" he said, springing to his feet. "If we were in France now, we should see daylight." He was in an emotional mood. He clapped his friend upon the shoulder. "We shall see one another again, my old one, before I start, no doubt. But if we don't, and anything happens to either of us—well, it is good luck to the survivor."

He shook hands with Paul, and Paul let him out of the house.

Paul went back to the room. The eagerness with which he had discussed the technical details of the expedition fell from him as soon as he was alone. He sat down at his table and remained there until dawn at last did break over the town. But he was not at work upon his report. He had pushed it from him and sat with his face between the palms of his hands.

CHAPTER IX

Marguerite moves on

The rumours of the camp were proved true the next morning, and the preparations for provisioning and concentrating so large a force were swiftly pushed forward. Gerald de Montignac was to march with his squadron in a week's time by Rabat and Sallee to Kenitra. Paul was to rejoin his battalion a few days later. Half of that battalion, Paul's company included, was to form part of the escort of Colonel Gouraud's huge supply column, which, with its hundreds of camels, was beginning to assemble at Meheydia at the mouth of the Sebou.

Paul was now a full captain in command of that company of the Tirailleurs which he had led during the last engagements of the Chaiovia campaign, and marked out by his superiors as an officer likely to reach the high ranks and responsibilities. He had still a few days of his leave, and he spent the greater part of them in the careful revision of his report. Gerard de Montignac, on his side, was engaged in the supervision of the equipment of his squadron, and was busy from morning until night. Two or three times during the course of the week he went down between nine and ten at night to the Villa Iris, and sat or danced for half an hour with Marguerite Lambert.

But he never saw Paul Ravenel there, and through the week the two friends did not meet except for a moment or two in the thronged streets.

"*Le grand serieux!*" said Gerard, speaking of Paul to Marguerite Lambert with an affectionate mockery. "He will be a general when I am an old major dyeing my moustache to make myself look young. But meanwhile, whilst we are both captains, I should like to see more of him than I do. For after all, we go out with our men—and one never knows who will come back."

Marguerite's face lost its colour at his words, and she drew in her breath sharply.

"Oh, it is our business, of course," he continued, taking her sympathy to himself. "Do you know, Marguerite, that for a second I thought you had stirred that thick soup in Paul's veins which he calls his blood? But no, he never comes here."

Marguerite laughed hurriedly, and asked at random:

"You have seen him to-day?"

"Yes. He was coming out of a house close to the port, with the agent who looks after his property, a little Italian. Paul was talking very earnestly, and did not notice me. He has a good deal of property in Casablanca, and was making his arrangements, no doubt, for a long absence."

Marguerite looked down at the table, tracing a pattern upon its surface with her finger. When she spoke again, her voice broke upon her words, and her lips quivered.

"I shall lose all my friends this week," she said.

"Only us two," said Gerard, consoling her

"That's what I mean," she returned with a little smile, and Gerard de Montignac leaned forward.

"Marguerite, I don't go for a couple of days," he said, lowering his voice to an eager whisper. "Let us make the best of them! Let me have the memory of two good days and nights to carry away with me, will you? Why not? My work is done. I could start off with my troops at six o'clock to-morrow instead of at six o'clock on the third morning. Give me the next two days."

Marguerite shook her head.

"No, my friend."

Gerard de Montignac knew nothing of that conversation which Henriette had held with Paul Ravenel on this spot a few nights before. He could but believe that Marguerite Lambert somehow found that dreadful gang of nondescripts with whom she forgathered more to her taste than him or his friend. She shone like a flower in this squalid haunt, a tired and drooping flower. It was extraordinary that she could endure this company for a moment, to say nothing of their embraces. But women, even the delicate amongst them, would blindfold their eyes and stop their ears, and cease to appreciate both the look of their friends and the esteem in which they are held, if their interest prompted them. Gerard de Montignac rose angrily from his chair.

"Of course, poor devils of officers like myself can't hope to compete with these rich Dagoes," he said brutally. "We must console ourselves with reflecting that our efforts and dangers have made them rich."

Marguerite Lambert flushed scarlet at the insult, and then lowered her head.

" I do not wish to speak to you again," she said, in a distinct, low voice, and Gerard de Montignac stalked out of the Villa Iris.

He was troubled by his recollection of the little scene during the next two days ; sometimes falling into a remorse, and sometimes repeating his own words with bravado, and arguing that this was the proper way to speak ; and always ending with a flood of heart-felt curses.

" Damn all Dagoes and Levantines ! There ought to be a special code for them. They ought to be made to take off their shoes when they meet us in the street. Those old Moors know something ! I'll never see that girl again as long as I live. Luckily she'll be gone by the time I come back to Casablanca. Henriette said she wouldn't dance at the Villa Iris for long. No, I won't see her again. "

He kept carefully away from the neighbourhood of the villa for thirty-six hours. Then a post came in and was delivered throughout the camp at eight o'clock in the evening. Amongst the letters which Gerard de Montignac received was one written in English by a Colonel Vanderfelt, in Sussex, praying for news of Paul Ravenel. Gerard had enough English to perceive how much anxiety and affection had gone to the composition of that letter.

" It ought to be answered at once," he said. " Paul must answer it."

Gerard looked at his watch. It was close upon nine now, and he was to parade at six in the morning. He

must hand over that letter to Paul to-night. He could have sent it by the post very well, or he could have written an answer to Colonel Vanderfelt himself. But he took up his cap instead and walked down from Ain-Bourdja towards the town. Very likely he had some unacknowledged purpose at the back of his mind. For he found himself presently standing before the Villa Iris, though that house lay well out of the road between the camp and Paul Ravenel's house by the seaward wall.

" Well, since I am here," he said, as though he had come to this spot quite by accident, " I may as well go in and make my peace with Marguerite Lambert. For all I know I may be quitting the world altogether very shortly, and why should I leave unnecessary enemies to hate my memory ? "

Thus he explained quite satisfactorily to himself his reason for entering and looking about him for Marguerite. But she was nowhere to be seen—no, not even amongst the Dagoes and the Levantines. She might be outside in the cool balcony beneath the roof of vines. But a glance here showed him that he was wrong. There was nothing for it but to approach the virago behind the bar, who, hotter and redder than ever on this night in early May, was polishing away at her counter and serving out the drinks.

Gerard ordered one, and taking it from her hand said carelessly :

" Mademoiselle Marguerite is not here to-night ? "

Madame Delagrange made a vicious dab with her duster and cried in exasperation :

" Look, monsieur ! When she is here I have

nothing but complaints. That little Marguerite! She holds her nose in the air as if we smelled. She looks at us as if we were animals at a circus—and she has nothing to be conceited about with her thin shoulders and tired face. Now she is gone, it is all the time: 'What have you done with our little Marguerite?' Well, I have done nothing." She turned to another customer. "For you, monsieur? A bottle of champagne? Abdullah shall bring it to you."

Abdullah, in his Turkish breeches, was handed the dreadful decoction, and Gerard de Montignac tried again.

"She has left the Villa Iris altogether?"

"Yes, yes, yes. She has gone, that Miss Ni-Touche!"

"And where has she gone?"

The harridan behind the bar flung up her hands.

"*Saperlipopette*, how should I know, I ask you? I beg you, monsieur, to allow me to serve my clients who do not think that because they have bought a whisky-soda they have become proprietors for the night of the Villa Iris."

With an indignant nod she turned to some other customers. Gerard wandered out into the veranda, where he sat down rather heavily. He was more troubled than he would have thought possible. After all, the disappearance of a little dancing girl from a bar in a coast town of Morocco!—what was there to make a fuss about in that? That is the way of little dancing girls. They dance and they disappear, a question or two from you and me and the next man are,

as it were, the ripples upon the pond, and then the surface is still once more.

But Gerard de Montignac could not dismiss Marguerite Lambert with this easy philosophy. He remembered her too clearly, her slim grace, the promise of real beauty if only she had food enough, her anger with him two evenings ago, and above all, the queer look of fatality set upon her like a seal. Marguerite Lambert gone! How and whither? One or two dreadful sentences spoken a fortnight ago in the mess by the Commandant Marnier were written in letters of flame upon his memory. Casablanca was the last halting-place but one in the ghastly pilgrimage of these poor creatures. The last of all—he shuddered to think of it! To picture Marguerite Lambert amongst its squalors was a sacrilege. Yet she had gone—she had moved on! There was the appalling fact.

He saw Henriette strolling a little way off between the tables. He beckoned eagerly to her. She looked at him doubtfully, then, with a mutinous air and a toss of the head, she strolled towards him.

"You want to speak to me? You were not very polite the last time."

"I will atone for my discourtesy to-night, Mademoiselle Henriette."

Henriette was induced to take a chair and order a drink.

Gerard believed that he must practise some diplomacy with this fiery creature if he was to get the truth from her, but as a fact he had not to put one question. For Henriette had hardly begun to sip her whisky and soda before she said:

" The little Marguerite ! She has been sent away. I am sorry I told you—didn't I ?—that she wouldn't stay here long."

" Sent away ? "

Henriette nodded.

" By madame."

" Last night ? "

" Yes. After all the guests had gone. But what a scene ! Oh la, la, la ! I was frightened, I can tell you. So were we all. We hid in the little room there off the bar, where we dress, and listened through the crack of the door. But a scene ! It was terrible."

" Tell me ! " said Gerard.

Henriette twitched her chair into the table with an actual excitement. She was really and deeply distressed for Marguerite. But for the moment her distress was forgotten. The joy of the story-teller had descended upon her.

" It was the Greek over there, Petras Tatarnis," she began. " He was mad for Marguerite, and she wouldn't have anything to do with him. So he got her turned away. See how drunk he is to-night. How proud of his fine revenge on a little girl who asked for nothing more than permission to earn her seven francs a night in peace."

" She wouldn't have anything to say to him ! " Gerard protested. " Why, she was always at that table where he sits."

" Yes. Because he is the real owner of the Villa Iris. Madame is no more than his servant. So Marguerite, since she wished to stay here, must be friendly to him. But Petras was not content with

friendliness, and last night when your friend came in——"

"My friend?" interrupted Gerard de Montignac.

"Yes, the one with the yellow hair and the long legs, and the face that tells you nothing at all."

"Paul! He was here last night!"

"Yes. Oh, he has come here more than once during the last week, but very late, and for a few minutes. He goes straight to that table and takes Marguerite away, as if he were the master; and somehow they all sit dumb as if they were lackeys. Imagine it, monsieur! All of them very noisy and boisterous and then—a sudden silence and the yellow-headed captain walking away with Marguerite Lambert as if they did not exist. It used to make the rest of us laugh, but they—they were furious with humiliation, and when, a little time afterwards, the captain had gone—oh, how bold they were! They would pull his nose for him the next time, they would teach him how gentlemen behave—oh, yes, yes! But it was always the next time that these fine lessons would be given."

Gerard de Montignac nodded his head.

"I know the breed."

Henriette described how Paul Ravenel had entered the bar a little after midnight. He had taken Marguerite Lambert away, danced a round or two, and given her some supper; and whilst she ate, Petras Tatarnis, emboldened by drink and the encouragements of his friends, had left his table and begun to prowl backwards and forwards behind Paul Ravenel's back, nodding and winking at his associates and muttering to himself. Paul had taken no notice, but Marguerite

had stopped eating, and sat in terror, watching him over Paul's shoulder like a bird fascinated by a snake. Tatarnis drew nearer and nearer with each turn. Marguerite sat twisting her hands and imploring Paul to go away and leave her. She was speaking in English, and in a whisper so that Henriette could not repeat the words. But it was easy enough to translate them. "It is for my sake," she was saying. "It is for my sake."

But Paul would not listen; and with a little helpless flutter of her frail hands Marguerite sank back in her chair. There would be a disturbance, very possibly a fight. Once more she was to be the Helen of a squalid Iliad, and the result would be what it always had been. She would move on—and this time there was no whither she could move. She had come to the end.

"I could read the despair in her eyes, in the utter abandonment of her body," said Henriette, but there had been much at that moment in Marguerite Lambert's thoughts which Henriette could not read at all. The passionate dream of her life was dying as she sat there. She had come to the end. It would have no chance of fulfilment now. Where, to-morrow, could she find the great love waiting for her? The dream had made her life possible, it had given her strength to endure the squalor of her lodging and her companions, and the loss of all that daintiness and order which mean so much to women. It had given her wit to defend herself against the approaches of her courtiers, and the self-respect which kept her with the manners of one of gentlest birth. Nearer and

nearer drew Petras Tatarnis, until he bumped against Paul's chair, and then very quickly and quietly Paul rose to his feet.

A stifled prayer burst from Marguerite's trembling lips. Then she covered her face with her hands and closed her ears with her thumbs. But there was no disturbance at all.

"The Captain Paul took Petras by the elbow," Henrietta continued, "and, looking down upon him, talked to him as one talks to a child. I could hear what he said: 'You are terrifying this lady. You must not behave like this in public places. You must go back to your place and sit very quietly, or you must go home.' And Petras went. Yes, without a word, as if he had been whipped, he went back to his chair amongst his friends. But I tell you, monsieur, his eyes had all hell in them! And after a little, very cautiously, afraid lest the Captain Paul should notice him, he crept to the counter and talked very earnestly with Madame."

"What was he saying?" asked Gerard de Montignac.

"I could not hear at all. I dared not even try to listen. I went to the table where Marguerite and her friend were sitting. Marguerite was imploring him to go away. I agreed with her. The storm was over. It was better for Marguerite's sake that he should go away quietly now without any fuss."

"And he went?" asked Gerard.

"Not at first," returned Henriette. "No, he was stubborn. He was thinking of his pride; as men do, not of the poor women who suffer by it. But at last

—it seemed that some idea came into his head, some thought which made him smile—he consented. He paid his bill and walked neither quickly nor slowly through the bar, and out by the passage into the street. And so the people settled down, and the trouble seemed at an end."

And so until the closing of the bar it was. As a rule the visitors had all gone by two o'clock in the morning ; and this particular night was no exception. It was the practice as soon as the room was empty for Madame Delagrange to pay the girls their seven francs apiece at the counter. They then crossed into the little dressing-room, changed their clothes, and went out into the lane by the street door, which was locked behind them. On this night, however, Madame Delagrange kept Marguerite Lambert to the last.

" You others can run away and get off your clothes. I want to have a little talk by myself with this delicate Miss Touch-me-not," she said, lolling over the counter with a wicked leer on her coarse, red face, and licking her lips over her victim. The others were very glad to hurry away and leave the old harridan and Marguerite alone in the gaudily-tiled, brightly-lit room. They kept the door of the dressing-room ajar, so that they could both see and hear what took place. But for a minute or two Madame Delagrange contented herself with chuckling and rubbing her fat hands together and looking Marguerite up and down from head to foot, and almost frightening the girl out of her wits. Marguerite stood in front of the counter, looking in her short dancing-skirt like a schoolgirl awaiting punishment.

" So this is how we repay kindnesses ! " Madame Delagrange began, slowly wetting her lips with her tongue. According to Henriette she was exactly like an ogress in a picture book savouring in anticipation the pretty morsel she meant to devour for supper. " We make troubles and inconveniences for the kind old fool of a woman who lets us sing our little songs in her bar, dance with her clients, and who pays us generously into the bargain. We won't help her at all to keep her roof over head. We treat her rich clients like mud. Only the beautiful officers are good enough for us. Bah ! And we are virtuous, too ! Oh, he, he, he ! Yes, but virtue isn't bread and butter, my little one. So here's an address." She took a slip of paper from the shelf behind her and pushed it towards Marguerite. Marguerite took a step forward to the counter and picked up the paper.

" What am I to do with this, madame ? " she asked in perplexity.

" You are to go to that address, mademoiselle."

" To-morrow ? "

" Now, little fool ! "

" Why ? "

" He is waiting for you."

Marguerite shrank back, her face white as paper, her great eyes wide with horror. " Who ? " she asked in a whisper.

" Petras Tatarnis."

Madame Delagrange nodded her head at Marguerite with an indignant satisfaction.

" Off you go ! We shall be a little more modest to-morrow evening, eh ? We shan't look at everybody

as if they would dirty our little slippers if we stepped on them. Come, take your seven francs and hurry off. Or," and she thrust out her lips savagely, " never come back to the Villa Iris."

Marguerite stood and stared at the paper in her hands.

" You can't mean it, madame ! "

Madame snorted contemptuously.

" Make your choice, little one. I want to go to bed."

Marguerite folded the paper and, with the tears running down her cheeks, slowly tore it across and across, and let the fragments flutter down to the floor. Madame Delagrange uttered an oath, and then let loose upon the girl such a flood of vile abuse that even those hiding behind the door of the dressing-room had never heard the like of it.

" Out with you," she said, spitting upon the ground and sweeping the seven francs off the counter towards Marguerite, so that they rolled and spun and rattled upon the floor. " Pick up your money and get your rags together and march ! Quick now ! "

She lolled over the counter screaming with laughter as Marguerite ran hither and thither seeking through her blinding tears for the coins, stooping and picking them up. " There's another somewhere," the old harridan cried, holding her fat sides. " Seek ! Seek ! Good dog ! It takes ten years off my life to see the haughty Miss Touch-me-not running about after her pennies."

Marguerite had got to retrieve them all. In the dreadful penury in which she lived, a single franc had the importance of gold. So she ran about the room,

searched under tables and chairs, and in the corners. The seven francs were all her capital. They stood between her and death by hunger. She must go on her knees and peer through the veil of her tears for the last of them. Even the women behind the door, hardened though they were, felt the humiliation of that scene in the marrow of their bones, felt it as something horrible and poignant and disturbing. As soon as Marguerite had picked up her money, Madame Delagrange shuffled out from behind the counter.

"Now come along with me. I mean to see that you don't take away what doesn't belong to you."

She took the weeping girl by the elbow and pushed her along in front of her to the dressing-room. Then she stood over her whilst she changed into her street dress and put up her dancing kit in a bundle.

"Do you miss anything, girls?" Madame Delagrange asked, with her heavy-handed irony, and indeed with an evident hope that one of them would miss something and the police could be sent for. But all of them were quick to say no, though not one of them had the courage to take Marguerite by the hand and wish her good luck in the face of the old blowsy termagant.

"Very well then!" and Madame Delagrange took a step towards Marguerite, who shrank back as if she expected a blow. Madame Delagrange laughed heartily at the girl's face, rejoicing to see her so cowed and broken.

"Come here," she said, and she grinned and beckoned with her finger with a grim sort of pleasantry.

Marguerite faltered across the room, and the big

woman took her prisoner again and marched her out through the bar on to the veranda.

"There! You can go out by the garden, and a good riddance to you!" Madame Delagrange banged the big doors behind Marguerite Lambert and bolted them, leaving her with her bundle in her hand standing on the boards beneath the roof of vines.

"That's the last we saw of her. Poor kid!" said Henriette. "If she hadn't been such a little fool! Do you know that for a moment or two I hoped that your friend——"

"Paul," Gerard de Montignac interrupted, with a nod of his head. "I also—for a moment or two. But women don't mean much to Paul."

Henriette laughed bitterly, wondering to what men women did mean anything at all. In her experience she had never run across them.

"I am afraid for that little one," she said, her thoughts coming back to Marguerite. "You know what happened? Her little bundle was found on the balcony this morning. The knot had broken, and her dancing dress, her slippers, her silk stockings, were lying scattered on the boards. She just left them where they fell. You see, they were her stock-in-trade. She had brought them over with her from France, and she has no money to replace them with, I am afraid."

Gerard de Montignac was conscious of a chill of fear, too. He recognised the significance of the abandonment of that bundle. The knot had burst, as Marguerite stood on the veranda, the doors shut behind her, the dark garden in front of her. She had not thought it worth while to gather her poor trifles of

finery together again. Their use was over. Whither had she gone? Was she alive now? Had those roaring breakers on the coast drawn her into their embrace and beaten her to death upon the rocks and the sands?

"Where does she lodge?" he asked sharply.

"I don't know," answered Henriette. "None of us know. She would never tell. I think that she had some poor little room of which she was ashamed. With her seven francs a day, she could have nothing else."

"I must find out," cried Gerard, and then he struck his fist upon the table. "But I can't find out. I march at six o'clock to-morrow morning for Fez."

"Your friend, then," Henriette suggested eagerly.

"Paul!" replied Gerard. "Yes. He has a few days still in Casablanca. He has compassion, he will help. I know him."

Henriette's face lightened a little.

"But he must be quick, very quick," she urged. "You will see him to-night?"

"I will go to him now"; and Gerard remembered the letter in his pocket from Colonel Vanderfelt. "I was, indeed, on my way to him when I came here."

Gerard looked at his watch. It was half-past ten. He had stayed longer than he had intended at the Villa Iris.

CHAPTER X

Colonel Vanderfelt's Letter

Gerard de Montignac found Paul still up, and putting the last words to the report of his long and solitary wanderings amongst the inland tribes. The report was to be dispatched the next morning to the Bureau des Affaires Indigènes at Rabat, and Gerard waited in patience until the packet was sealed up. Then he burst out with his story of what had taken place on the night before at the Villa Iris. Paul listened without an interruption, but his face grew white with anger and his eyes burned as he heard of Madame Delagrange's coarse abuse and Marguerite's tears and humiliations.

"So you see, Paul, it was your fault in a way," Gerard urged. "Of course, sooner or later Petras Tatarnis—damn his soul!—would have presented his ultimatum, as he did last night, but you were the occasion of it being done."

"Yes," Paul agreed.

"Then you must find her. You must do what you can, send her home, give her a chance. I'd start searching myself this very night. But you have more time and better means of discovering her."

"Yes."

Paul had knocked about Casablanca as a boy. He

had many friends amongst the natives, and was accustomed to sit with them by the hour, drinking mint tea and exchanging jokes. He was a man of property besides in that town, and could put out a great many feelers in different quarters.

" I have no doubt that I can discover where she is," he said, " if she is still in Casablanca."

" Where else can she be unless it's in the sea ? " cried Gerard. " But remember you have got to be quick. She had only the seven francs. God knows what has become of her ! "

He stood gazing at the lamp as if he could read her whereabouts in that white flame as the gifted might do in a crystal ; with his cap tilted on the back of his head and a look of grave trouble upon his face.

" I'll find her, never fear," said Paul Ravenel, touching his friend upon the arm. " And what I can do to keep her from harm that I will do."

Gerard responded to the friendliness and the assurance in Paul's voice. He shook off his dejection.

" Thank you, *mon vieux*," he said, and held out his hand. " Well, we shall meet in Fez."

He had reached the door before he remembered the primary reason for his visit.

" By the way, I have a letter about you from someone in England, a Colonel Vanderfelt. Yes, he is anxious for news of you. He wrote to me because in your letters to him you had more than once spoken of me as your friend."

A shadow darkened Paul's face as he listened, and a look of pain came into his eyes. He took the letter from Gerard.

" Have you answered it, Gerard ? "

" No. It only reached me to-night. I must leave that to you."

" Right."

The door-keeper let Gerard out, and he tramped through the now silent and empty streets the length of the town to the Market Gate ; and so to his quarters in the camp at Ain-Bourdja. Some years were to pass before the two friends met again.

Paul stood for a long time just as Gerard had left him, with Colonel Vanderfelt's letter in his hand. The fragrance of an English garden seemed to him to sweeten this Moorish room. Though the lattices were wide open, he heard no longer the thunder of the great breakers upon the shore. The letter was magical and carried him back on this hot night of May to a country of cool stars. The garden, he remembered, would be white with lilac, the tulips would be in flower, the rhododendrons masses of red and mauve, against the house the wistaria would be hanging in purple clusters. And in the drawing-room some very kindly people might at this moment be counting the date on which they could expect an answer to this letter.

Well, the answer would never come.

" All those pleasant dreams are over," thought Paul. " They have not heard from me for more than a year. Let the break be complete!" And with a rather wistful smile he tore the letter into shreds. Then he went out, and turning into a street by the sea-wall, came to that house from which Gerard de Montignac had seen him and his agent depart three days before. A lattice was open on the first floor, and from a wide

window a flood of golden light poured out upon the night. Paul whistled gently and then waited at the door. It was thrown open in a few seconds, just time enough for someone to run down the stairs and open it. Paul stepped into a dark passage, and a pair of slender arms closed about his neck and drew his face down.

"Marguerite, why didn't you tell me how that venomous old harridan treated you?" he whispered.

Marguerite Lambert laughed with a note of utter happiness which no one had heard from her for a long while.

"My dear, what did it matter any longer?" And clinging to him passionately, she pressed her lips to his.

* * * * *

Paul could have added a postscript to Henriette's story, as Gerard de Montignac had told it to him, if he had so willed. For when Marguerite Lambert stood alone on that veranda, her bundle in her hand, a figure had risen up out of the darkness of the garden and stepped on to the boards. She recoiled at the first moment in terror, and her bundle slipped from her hand and scattered its contents.

"Marguerite," the man whispered, and with a wild throb of her heart she knew it was Paul Ravenel who was speaking to her.

"You! You!" she said, in so low a voice that though he stood at her side, the words only reached his ears like a sigh. "Oh!" And her arms were about his shoulders, her hands tightly clasped behind

his head, and her tear-stained cheeks pressed close against the breast of his tunic. He tried to lift her face, but she would not let him.

"No! No!" she whispered. He could feel her bosom rising and falling, and hear the sobs bursting from her throat. Then she flung up her face.

"My dear! My dear! I was hoping that some sudden thing would kill me, because I couldn't do it myself. And then—you are here!"

She drew herself from his arms, and not knowing what she did, she kneeled and began to gather together her scattered belongings. Paul Ravenel laughed, and stooping, lifted her up.

"You won't want those things any more, my dear," and with his arm about her he led her from the garden through the quiet streets to this house by the sea-wall which had been got ready against her coming.

CHAPTER XI

A Dilemma

It was the sixteenth day of April in the following year. The dawn broke over Fez sullen and unfriendly as the mood of the city. And all through the morning the clouds grew heavier. Many watched them with anxiety through that forenoon; the French Mission which was to set out on the morrow, on its return to Rabat with the treaty of the Protectorate of Morocco signed and sealed in its pocket; Mulai Hafid himself, now for these many months Sultan, who was to travel with the Mission, on his way to Paris; various high dignitaries of State, who though outwardly wreathed in smiles and good will had prepared a little surprise for the Mission in one of the passes on its line of march to the coast; and various young officers of the escort who, after ten months of garrison duty outside Fez, welcomed a chance of kicking up their heels for a week or two in the cafés of the coast towns. Like conversation before dinner, all these arrangements depended on the weather.

At twelve o'clock Mulai Hafid gave a farewell luncheon to the Mission in his great palace in Fez-Djedid; and after luncheon he conducted his guests to a pavilion looking upon a wide open space called Mechouar. They had hardly reached the pavilion

before a storm burst with all the violence of the tropics. The pavilion was like everything else in Morocco. It had never been finished when it was new, and never repaired when it was old; and, very soon, the rain breaking through the flimsy roof had driven the guests from the first floor to the chamber of audience below, and was splashing down the stairs in a cascade. A general discomfort prevailed. Mulai Hafid himself was in a difficult mood. To one French Commissioner of importance who apologised to him because a certain general, lately promoted from colonel, had not yet had time to procure the insignia of his new rank, Mulai Hafid replied dryly:

"The sooner he gets them the better. He'll want them all to protect him before he has done."

And a little later when the Head of the Mission, with whom he was playing chess, indiscreetly objected to the Sultan moving surreptitiously one of his knights with a latitude not authorised by the rules, he turned in vexation to a Kaid of his friends and said: "See what I have come to! I can no longer even move my own cavalry as I please, without the consent of his Excellency and the French."

Altogether it was an uneasy luncheon party. Alone Paul Ravenel was content. He was on duty with the Mission, and all the morning his face had been as cloudy as the sky because the storm did not break. Now he stood at a window of the upper room, sheltering himself as best he might from the leaks of the roof and smiled contentedly. Lieutenant Praslin, who a year before had trumpeted the praises of Marguerite Lambert in the mess at Ain-Bourdja, stood at his elbow.

Praslin commanded now a platoon in Paul's company and held his chief in awe. But annoyance spurred him to familiarity.

"You are amused, my old one, are you?" he inquired. "We are of the escort to-morrow. We shall swim through mud. The banks of the rivers will be as slippery as a skating rink. We shall have horses and camels tumbling about and breaking our necks. We shall have ladies in the party, too. And you are amused! Name of a name, you have a sense of humour, my captain."

"I laugh," replied Paul, "because if the rain continues we shan't go at all."

"And you don't want to go! To arrive safely at Rabat with the Mission, it might easily mean one step."

That Paul should despise the indifferent gaieties of Rabat and Casablanca—that was understood. He was the serious one, destined for the high commands. But here was opportunity, and Paul Ravenel had been quick to seize upon opportunity. There had been a pretty little fight between Kenitra and Segota when Paul was in command of the advance guard of Colonel Gouraud's convoy; and Paul had fought his little battle with a resourceful skill which had brought his name into the orders of the day. He had been for ten months now in command of his company at the great camp at Dar-Debibagh, four kilometres out of Fez. These were days of rapid promotion in an army where as a rule promotion was slow. A successful march to Rabat might well make him commandant and give him his battalion. Yet the look upon his

face, as he watched the sheets of rain turning the plain of the Mechouar into a marsh, was the look of a man—no, not relieved, but reprieved—yes, actually reprieved, thought the Lieutenant Praslin.

Below them in the chamber of audience the chiefs of the Mission were at this moment debating the postponement of the journey, and they came quickly to the only possible decision. The departure was put off for three days.

" We shall go then, however," said Praslin when this decision was announced. " The escort is made up. There will be no change."

" I wonder," Paul Ravenel replied. " In three days a man may learn wisdom. The Mission may after all wait until a sufficient force is assembled to protect it properly, and then the whole personnel of the escort may be changed."

" Oh, those stories ! " cried Praslin contemptuously. He had the official mind which looks upon distrust of official utterances as something next to sacrilege. And official utterances had been busy of late. There was no truth, they declared stoutly, in those stories that the Maghzen, the Government itself, was stirring up disaffection and revolt behind the back of the Mission. Very likely the people of Fez were saying that the Sultan was the prisoner of the French, that he was being taken to Rabat and Paris to be exhibited triumphantly as a captive ; but the people of Fez were born gossips and there was no danger in their talk. Had not the Grand Vizier himself pledged his word that the country was quiet ? Thus the official mind. Thus too, consequently, Lieutenant Praslin,

who was very anxious to see life as it is lived in the coast towns. And if the Intelligence Division and some soldiers who had spent years in the country took a different view, why, soldiers were always alarmists and foolish people, and it was waste of time to listen to them.

Paul rode back through the rain with Lieutenant Praslin to the camp at Dar-Debibagh when the reception was over. They went by the Bab Segma and the bridge over the Fez river. The track was already a batter of mud above the fetlocks of their horses. At seven o'clock, however, the rain ceased, and Paul, changing into a dry uniform, went to Praslin's tent.

"I am dining with a friend of mine in Fez," he said, "and I shall not be back until late."

"The battalion parades at six in the morning," Praslin reminded him. "The order has not been countermanded."

"I know," answered Paul. "I shall be on duty, of course," and mounting his horse he rode again into the city.

He rode back by the way he had come, and just within the Bab Segma he met four Moors mounted upon mules richly caparisoned, and themselves wearing robes of a spotless white. They were clearly men of high rank, and one rode a little in advance of the others. As Paul drew closer to them he recognised this man as the Minister for War and one of the most important dignitaries of the Maghzen. Paul saluted him, and to his amazement the Minister did not return the salute, but turned to one of his companions with a dishonouring word.

"*Djiffa*!" he said contemptuously, and spat on the ground.

Paul took no notice of the insult. But if he had needed proof of the stories which the official mind refused to entertain, here it was openly avowed. Very likely the postponement of the Mission's departure had upset the precious plans of the Maghzen and the Minister of War was showing his displeasure. The point of importance to Paul was that he should dare to show it so openly. That could but imply very complete plans for an ambuscade in force on the road of the Mission to the coast, and a very complete confidence as to the outcome.

Paul began to think of his own affairs.

"Suppose that the Mission and its escort are destroyed," he reflected. "I have left nothing to chance. . . . No! . . . The blow must fall as lightly as I can make possible."

He enumerated one by one the arrangements which he had made, and recalled the wording of his instructions to his solicitors and agents.

"No, I can think of nothing else," he concluded. He had a final request for help to make to-night, and he was very sure that he would not make it in vain. "No, whatever money can do to lighten the blow, that has been done. And money can do much assuredly. Only—only," and he admitted to himself at last, with a little shiver, a dark thought which he had hitherto driven off, "she is just the kind of girl who might commit suttee."

He rode along the main street into the quarter of Tala. It was a street always narrow, but sometimes

so narrow that if two mules met they could hardly pass. High walls of houses without any windows made it a chasm rather than a street. At rare intervals it widened into a " place " or square, where a drinking fountain stood or a bridge crossed a stream. It was paved with broken cobble-stones, with a great rut in the middle where the feet of the mules and horses had broken down to the brown earth beneath ; and here and there a slippery mill-stone on which the horses skidded had been let into the cobbles by way of repair. It climbed steeply, and steeply fell, and in places the line of houses was broken by a high garden wall above which showed orange trees laden with their fruit and bougainvillæa climbing.

At times he passed under an archway where the street was built over above his head, and huge solid doors stood back against the walls on either hand, that one quarter might be shut off from another during the night, or in times of trouble. On his right hand a number of alleys led into the Souk ben Safi and the maze of Fez el Bali. Into one of these alleys Paul turned, and stopped in front of a big house with an imposing door studded with nails, and a stone by which to mount a horse.

He dismounted and knocked upon the door. To his surprise it was not at once thrown open. He looked about him. There was no servant waiting to take his horse in charge. If there had been a mistake ! Paul's heart sank at the thought. Suppose that his friend Si el Hadj Arrifa, on whom so much now might depend, had been called away from his home ? But that couldn't be—surely ! However peremptory the

summons had been, so punctilious a personage as Si el Hadj Arrifa would have found a moment wherein to put off his expected guest. Yet if nevertheless it were so!

Paul Ravenel felt the weighty letter under his tunic, and gazed at the blank wall of the great house with troubled eyes. Oh, he must talk with his friend to-night! In three days the Mission and its escort were to start. He might not get another chance. He redoubled his blows upon the door, and at last he heard a key turn in the lock and a clatter as the wooden crossbars were removed.

That sound completed his uneasiness. He had ridden through the city thinking of his own affairs, his eyes in blinkers. Now retracing his steps in memory, he recalled that the streets had been strangely quiet, strangely empty. And here at the end of his journey was this hospitable house barricaded against an invited guest.

"Oh, no," he said, seeking to reassure himself, "the danger's out there in the 'bled,' on the way to the coast, not here in the town."

But a picture rose before his mind of four notable Moors in milk-white robes, mounted on mules with trappings of scarlet and silver, who sneered openly at the uniform and spat. Paul Ravenel was frightened now. If it was not only in the "bled" that danger threatened, then all his careful letters and arrangements were worth just as much as the cobble-stones underneath his feet.

The door was open at last, and as a servant took Paul's horse by the bridle and led it away to a stable,

Paul hurried impatiently into the house. But he was no more impatient than the servant who closed and bolted the door behind him; and in the passage he saw a small troop of attendants, every one of them armed, and at the entrance from the passage into the central court Si el Hadj Arrifa himself with a face of fear and in the attitude of a man poised for flight.

But when he caught sight of the gold lace upon Paul's uniform, the Moor's face changed to surprise, and surprise in its turn to a smile of welcome. Si el Hadj Arrifa was a stout man, fair, like so many of the Fasi, with a fringe of beard round his fat face. He was dressed in a silken shirt with an over garment of pink tissue under his white djellaba, and his hands were as well kept as a woman's. He wore a fine white haik over his turban and fez.

"I am afraid that you didn't expect me," said Paul.

"Your Excellency is always welcome," replied Si el Hadj Arrifa. "Our poor little meal is ready."

But it was not ready, and Paul's uneasiness increased. He knew, however, that he would hear nothing until hospitality was satisfied of its ceremonies, and then only by a roundabout road. He was led into a room opening by means of a wide archway on to the court. In one corner of the room stood a big modern brass bedstead. It was an ornament and a decoration, nothing more. For sleep, cushions upon the tiled floor were used. Round the wall there were a great number of clocks—grandfather clocks, heavy Victorian clocks of ormolu, clocks of marble—most of them ticking away but registering quite different

hours, and on the tiled floor stood two branched candlesticks of shining silver, with the candles burning. Thick cushions were stretched upon the tiles about the candles, and upon them Paul and his host took their seats.

Si el Hadj Arrifa was a personage in Fez, a man of influence in politics and of great wealth. He had visited Manchester more than once to buy cotton goods, and he talked of that town whilst they waited for dinner.

"They have good dentists," he said.

Paul looked at this *soigné* and dainty gentleman in the fine setting of his beautiful house, and smiled to think of the figure he must cut in Manchester. He probably wore a black gown like a gabardine and elastic-sided boots over white woollen socks, and lived in a small room in a dingy street. But Si el Hadj Arrifa fell soon into an uneasy silence, and sat listening with his head cocked, as if he expected some sound from the city without to ring out over the open square in the roof above the court. A fountain was playing in the centre of the court in honour of the visitor, but the Moor called to a servant to turn it off, since the splash and tinkle of the water so filled the ears that they could apprehend nothing else.

Dinner was brought in at last by a couple of negresses, and Paul must eat of each course, beginning with sweetmeats, and ranging through a couscouss, a roasted leg of mutton and a stuffed chicken. Paul put his right hand into the dish and tore at the meat in the due fashion and accepted tit-bits from the

fingers of his host. Some orange water was brought for him to drink, and when the long meal was over one of the negresses carried in a ewer and soap and poured water over their hands whilst they washed them.

" Yes, they have good dentists in Manchester," said Si el Hadj Arrifa, and taking a complete set of shining teeth from his mouth, he washed them and polished them and replaced them.

" They seem to have very good dentists there," said Paul, with befitting gravity.

A silver tea-kettle was brought and a silver spirit lamp, and Si el Hadj Arrifa brewed two little cups of heavily-sweetened green tea and flavoured it with mint. But even while engaged upon this important work he still kept his head cocked a little on one side, as though he still listened for some dreaded yet expected sound. And when he handed the cup to Paul, it rattled in the saucer.

Nothing on this evening had so startled Paul Ravenel. His heart jumped within his breast. Si el Hadj Arrifa was not merely disturbed. His hand was shaking. He was desperately afraid. He drew a breath and leaned forward to speak, and Ravenel said to himself with relief : " At last ! It is coming ! "

But he was wrong. His host only inquired whether Paul had ever visited America.

" No," he answered.

" A man in Manchester told me that they had a way there of stuffing turkeys which was very good. But they used oysters for it, and, of course, so far from the sea, we can get none at Fez."

"Some day there will be a railway," said Paul consolingly.

Si el Hadj Arrifa made another brew of tea, this time suspending in the brew a little lump of ambergris to flavour it.

"I must begin," thought Paul as he took his cup. He felt for the big letter in his tunic, but before he could take it from his breast his host spoke in a low, quiet tone, words which at first seemed of little more importance than any which had been spoken before, and afterwards were able to set Paul's heart fluttering.

"I sent a messenger this evening to you at the camp at Dar Debibagh."

"He missed me," replied Paul.

"It is a pity."

"Why?"

"I sent him to warn you not to come into Fez to-night."

"Why?"

"You are my friend. There is danger."

"But outside the city," cried Paul, "from the tribes—after we have marched."

"Here in Fez, too," Si el Hadj Arrifa insisted in a voice which now frankly shook with terror. "For you and all of your creed that dwell in this city."

Paul was already on his feet, his face and his eyes set in a stare of horror. Si el Hadj Arrifa quite misunderstood the French officer's manner. He said soothingly:

"You shall stay in my house till it is all over."

"All over?" Paul repeated. He took his hand from the bulky letter in his tunic. If the dreadful

news were true, his plans must change. His heart sank as he caught a glimpse of how they must change.

" I must know more, my friend," he said, and he sat quietly down again upon the cushions.

" There are the Askris," said the man of Fez, " the tribesmen. You have taken them too quickly into your armies. You have armed them too quickly. You have placed them with their instructors in the Kasbah des Cherarda by the Segma gate as a garrison for this town. Oh, madness ! "

" Yes," Paul agreed. " We should have waited a year—two years."

" They are told that they must carry knapsacks," continued Si el Hadj Arrifa. " With us that is work for women, an insult to men."

" But it isn't true," said Paul Ravenel.

" What does that matter if it is believed ? The knapsacks were carried on mules publicly through the city, so that all men might see them. Six thousand of them."

" Not by our orders," said Paul, and the swift look and the shrug of the shoulders with which the protest was received told him much. It was by the order of the Maghzen that those knapsacks had been paraded. The Government itself was behind the movement in the city as it was behind the insurrection on the plains. Once more he saw very clearly the four contemptuous notables upon their mules.

" Of course, we have known of this trouble," said Paul slowly. " But we thought that each instructor could make it clear to his men that the story was a lie."

Si el Hadj Arrifa flung up his hands.

"Oh, the great lessons and nothing is learnt! Was there not trouble once for the English in India? Was there not talk of cartridges greased with the fat of pigs? It was not true. No, but it served. As the knapsacks will serve in Fez."

"A little time," cried Paul Ravenel, clutching at the straw of that faint hope.

"There is no time," answered Si el Hadj Arrifa. "Listen!" He looked swiftly behind him into the shadows of the court to make sure that there were none to overhear. "The revolt in Fez was planned for to-morrow, after the Mission had departed. There was to be a scouring."

"Yes."

"The Askris are ready—more than ready. It was difficult to hold them in, even with the promise of to-morrow. Now that the departure is postponed, they will not wait. It needs a word perhaps, but the speaking of that word cannot be delayed."

Paul nodded gloomily.

"And they won't believe it," he said in a dull, quiet voice, as he stared upon the ground. Believe it? Paul Ravenel knew very well that were he to batter down the door of the Embassy they would not even allow him to blurt his story out. Why should he come prattling his soldier's silliness at that unearthly hour? Let him go back to his camp and await his well-deserved reprimand in the morning! There are proper channels by which presumptuous young officers must address their importunities. It is the history of many disasters. Politics and ambition and the play of parties must decide what is going to happen, not

prescience or knowledge. Is a country notoriously *studiis asperrima belli?* Let us never admit it, lest we range against us this or that faction which is strong enough to bring us down! It's all a gamble. So let us plank our money and everybody else's and their lives into the bargain on to our colour and chance it turning up. "All rising to Great Place is by a winding stair." So we must twist and turn and see nothing beyond the next step by which we mount. Authority in Fez had just been given the cravat of Grand Officer of the Legion of Honour, because the negotiations for the Protectorate had been conducted so smoothly and had ended in so resounding a success. It would never do for authority to listen to any intrusive soldier who insisted that murder and torture were knocking on the door. Had not the Maghzen declared that the tribesmen in the "bled" were only thinking of their husbandry? Did not the Grand Vizier himself guarantee the good will and peacefulness of Fez?

"They have stopped their ears and bandaged their eyes," said Paul.

"But you will stay here to-night," his friend urged. "No one, I think, saw you come into my house, and my servants are faithful. Yes, you will stay here and be safe until this danger is overpast."

Paul shook his head.

"That I cannot do," he said, and Si el Hadj Arrifa, hearing the tone he used, knew that there would be no persuading him.

"Then go while you can, and ride quickly, with your pistol loose in its holster"

But even so Paul did not move.

" Wait ! " he said.

He raised his head to listen. The night was still as a tomb. A cry even from the most distant corner of the city, it seemed to him, must carry to this open space of darkness above them. He had time. " Yes, wait ! " he repeated, and he went apart into the shadowy patio. Never had he been set to face so tragic a dilemma. He knew Si el Hadj Arrifa too well to doubt him. Nor indeed had he any real doubt as to the choice which he himself would make. The choice was in truth made, had been made from the moment he was sure that torture and massacre threatened those who remained in Fez as much as those who marched to Rabat. But he stood in that shadowy court of marble and tiles, gazing with a great sorrow upon many lovely cherished things which he was now for ever to forego, his own hopes and ambitions, a little circle of good friends, honour and good report, a career of active service and study well applied, and at the end of it all a name cleansed of its stain, and—even now the picture rose before his mind—a dreamlike high garden fragrant with roses, from which one looked out over moonlit country to the misty barrier of the Downs. It was such a farewell as he had never thought to make, and when he turned back into the room his face was twisted as with a physical pain and anguish lay deep in his brooding eyes.

He took the envelope from his breast.

" I shall trust you with more than my life," he said.

" Your Excellency has honoured me with his friendship. I am his servant in all things."

"I have been for three nights writing this letter. I had it in my mind to open it here and read it to you. But the bad news you have given me points to another way. It may be that there will be no need to use it. I give it into your hands, and I beg you to keep it sealed as it is, until you are certain of my death. If I am alive, I shall find a means to let you know. If I am dead, I pray you to do all that I have written here."

Si el Hadj Arrifa took the letter and bowed his forehead upon it, as though it carried the very Sultan's seal.

"With God's will, I will do as you direct."

Paul took his friend by the hand, and looked him in the eyes.

"I could not rest quiet in my grave if my wishes written there were not fulfilled—if misfortune struck where there is no need that it should strike. A voice would call to me, in sorrow and distress, and I should hear it and stir in my grave though I was buried metres deep in clay. It is a promise?"

"Yes."

Si el Hadj Arrifa struck a bell, and a man came out to him from the servants' quarters.

"All is quiet, Mohammed?"

"Up till this hour."

"His Excellency's horse, then! You will go in front of him with a lantern as far as the Bab Segma. His Excellency returns to the camp at Dar Debibagh."

The servant's eyes opened wide in fear. He looked from his master to his master's guest, as though both of them had been smitten with madness. Then he

went out upon his business, and the two men in the court heard the fall of the bars and the grinding of the lock of the door.

"I will put this away," said Si el Hadj Arrifa, balancing the letter in his hands ; and he went upstairs to his own room. When he came down Paul was standing in the patio, with his cap upon his head.

"I will bid you good-bye here, my friend," said Paul, but his host, terrified though he was, would not so far fall short of his duties. He went out with Paul Ravenel to the street. The city all about them was very quiet. There was no light anywhere but the light in the big lantern which Mohammed was carrying in one hand whilst he held the bridle of Paul's horse with the other. Paul mounted quickly and without a word. Si el Hadj Arrifa stood in the doorway of his house. He watched the lantern dwindle to a spark, he heard the sharp loud crack of the horse's shoes upon the cobbles soften and grow dull. He waited until the spark had vanished, and, a little time afterwards, the beat of the hoofs had ceased. And still there was no sign of any trouble, no distant clamour as of men gathering, no shrill cries from the women on the roofs. He went back into his house.

CHAPTER XII

The little Door in the Angle

Si el Hadj Arrifa squatted upon his cushions and stared at the flames of the candles in his branched silver candlestick. Captain Paul Ravenel would be half-way through the Tala now. It was always in that quarter of the town that turbulence began. He would be half-way through the Tala, therefore half-way between this house and the Bab Segma too. And as yet there was not a cry. Si el Hadj Arrifa had never known a night so still. But then he had never listened before with such an intensity of fear, fear for himself, fear for that friend of his riding through the silent town, with the lantern swinging close to the ground in front of him. The sky had cleared after the rain, and the stars were bright above the open square of the roof. But it was dark, and once past the Bab Segma and clear of the town Paul Ravenel would slip like a swift shadow over the soft ground to Dar-Debibagh. He must be near the gates by now. Si el Hadj Arrifa pictured him now skirting the gardens of Bou Djeloud and very close to the gate; a few yards more, that was all. Si el Hadj Arrifa imagined him knocking upon the gate for the watchman to open it. A sense of relief stole over the Moor. Mohammed would be back very soon now. Upon

the relief followed drowsiness. Si el Hadj Arrifa's head fell forward upon his breast, and his body slipped into an easier attitude. . . .

Yes, Paul Ravenel was undoubtedly rapping upon the Segma gate, but rapping rather urgently, rather insistently. How those dogs of watchmen slept, to be sure! And Si el Hadj Arrifa woke with a start and very cold. It was upon his own outer door that someone knocked urgently and insistently.

The Moor rose to his feet and stopped. His eyes had fallen upon his fine silver candlesticks, and he stood upright and stiff in a paralysis of terror. The candles had burnt low. He had slept there for a long time. Mohammed should have been back an hour ago. The sound of his knocking, too, urgent yet, with all its urgency, discreet, spoke, like a voice of fear. Something untoward then had happened. Yet the city still slept. Si el Hadj Arrifa was no braver than most of his fellow-townsmen. He shivered suddenly and violently, and little whimpers of panic broke from his lips. Massacres were not conducted quietly. Uproar and clamour waited upon them; and the strange and eerie silence brooding over the town daunted the soft, luxurious Moor till his bones seemed to melt within his body. It was stealthy and sinister, like an enemy hidden in the dark. He crept into the passage and listened. There was nothing to hear but the urgent scratching and rapping upon the door.

"Is that you, Mohammed?" he asked.

"Yes, master."

Si el Hadj Arrifa unfastened the door and held it ajar, looking out. Mohammed was alone, and there was no longer a lantern in his hand.

" Come in ! And make no noise ! " said Si el Hadj Arrifa.

Mohammed slipped into the passage, closed the strong door so cautiously that not a hinge whined, then locked and bolted and barred it.

" Now follow me ! "

The Moor led the way back to the room with the brass bedstead, and sank like a man tired out on to the cushions. His servant stood in front of him with a passive, mask-like face and eyes which shone bright with fear in the light of the candles. " Speak low ! " said Si el Hadj Arrifa ; and this is the story which Mohammed told in a voice hardly above a whisper.

The French officer did not ride to the Segma Gate. He called in a quiet voice to Mohammed, and turned off towards the Bab-el-Hadid on the south of the town.

" The Bab-el-Hadid ! " Si el Hadj Arrifa repeated, in wonderment.

" But his Excellency did not go as far as the gate. He stopped at the hospital and dismounted," said Mohammed.

Si el Hadj Arrifa's face lightened. The hospital was the head-quarters of the military command. Paul Ravenel had taken his story there.

Paul had remained for a long time in the hospital. Two officers came out with him at length, one of whom was dressed in slippers and pyjamas with a dressing-

gown thrown on as if he had been wakened from his bed.

" Was his Excellency smiling ? " asked Si el Hadj Arrifa.

" No. The other two were smiling. His Excellency shrugged his shoulders and mounted his horse heavily like a man in trouble."

Si el Hadj Arrifa nodded his head and muttered to himself.

" They will not believe," he said. " No, they will not believe." He looked towards Mohammed. " Then he went out by the Bab-el-Hadid ? "

But Paul had not. He had turned his back to the Bab-el-Hadid and bade Mohammed lead to the Karouein quarter.

They went for a while through silent, empty streets, Mohammed ten paces or so ahead, holding the lantern so that the light shone upon the ground and Paul Ravenel following upon his horse. Mohammed did not turn round at all to see that the captain was following him, but the shoes of the horse clacked on the cobbles just behind him and echoed from wall to wall. They came to the first gate, and it was open. The great doors stood back against the wall and the watchman was not at his post. Mohammed was frightened. An omission to shut off the quarters of the city one from the other at night could not be due to negligence. This was an order given by authority. However, no one stopped them ; they saw no one ; they heard no one.

They came to a second gate. This, too, stood wide. Beyond the gate the street was built over

for a long way, making a black tunnel, and halfway down the tunnel it turned sharply at a right angle. When this corner had been turned, a glimmer of twilight far ahead would show where the tunnel ceased.

Mohammed passed in under the roof over the street, and after he had walked some twenty paces forward, he judged that Captain Ravenel had fallen a little behind, the shoes of the horse no longer rang so clearly on the stones. He turned then, and saw horse and rider outlined against the dark sky, as they reached the tunnel's mouth. He noticed Paul Ravenel bend forward over the neck of his horse to prevent his head from knocking against the low roof. Then he entered the tunnel, and was at once swallowed up in the blackness of it.

Mohammed walked forward again rather quickly. For he was afraid of this uncanny place, and turned the angle of the street without looking round again. He did not think at all. If he had, he would have understood that once the feeble flicker of his lantern were lost beyond the corner, Paul Ravenel would be left in the darkness of the blind, the mouth of the tunnel behind him, a blank wall before his face. Mohammed was in a fever to reach the open street again, and now that he saw it in front of him at the end of the passage, opaquely glimmering as an uncurtained window on a dark night will glimmer to one in a room, he pushed eagerly forward. He was close to the outlet when he realised that no horse's hoofs rang on the cobbles behind him.

He turned and peered back into the tunnel. There

was nothing to be seen, and there was no sound. Mohammed did not dare to call out. He stood wavering between his duty and his fear; and suddenly a tremendous clatter broke the silence and frightened Mohammed out of his wits. Mohammed had just time to draw back close against the wall when a horse dashed past him at full gallop. A stirrup iron struck and tore his djellaba, and the horse was gone—out of the tunnel up the street. But Mohammed's eyes were now accustomed to the darkness. He was able to see against the sky that the horse was riderless.

Something had startled the horse, and the French captain was thrown. He was lying on the ground back there, in the darkness. That was all! Thus Mohammed reasoned, listening. Yes, certainly that was all—except that it might well be that the French captain was hurt.

Mohammed must return and find out. Quaking with alarm he retraced his steps, throwing the light of his lantern on one side of the passage after the other. But so far the passage was empty. No doubt the captain would be lying on the ground beyond the angle where the tunnel turned. But here, too, he searched in vain. The captain had disappeared: somewhere between the two outlets in this black place. He had gone!

Mohammed lifted the lantern above his head, swinging it this way and that so that the light flickered and danced upon the walls. Then his arm grew steady. Opposite to him in the darkest corner there was a little door studded with great nails—a door you might

never perceive though you passed through the tunnel ten times a day. Mohammed crossed to it, touched it, shook it. It was locked and bolted. He was debating whether he should knock upon it or no. But he dared not. This was the beginning of that Holy War which was to free El Mogreb from the clutch of the Christians, the stealthy beginning. To-morrow there would not be one of them alive in Fez, and outside Fez the land would be one flame of vengeance. If the French captain were behind that little door he must be praying for a swift death !

Mohammed drew back, and suddenly the mouth of the tunnel was obscured, and he saw the figures of two men. Panic had been hovering about Mohammed these many minutes since. It took him by the throat and the heart now. With a cry he dashed his lantern on the ground and fled, leaping past the two men. He was not followed.

This is the story which Mohammed told to Si el Hadj Arrifa in the room with the clocks and the brass bedstead and the silver candelabra.

" That is the gate by the Karouein Mosque ? " said the master, when his servant had done.

" Yes."

Si el Hadj Arrifa nodded his head thoughtfully. He did not believe that the captain had been captured or slain in this noiseless fashion. He himself had been bidden not to open that big envelope locked away upstairs until he was very certain that Paul Ravenel was dead. The captain had his plans into which it was no business of his friend to pry.

"As to that little door, Mohammed," he said, "it will be well to forget it."

"It is forgotten, master," answered Mohammed, and far away, but very clear and musical in the silence of the night, the voice of a mueddin on a lofty minaret called the Faithful to their prayers.

CHAPTER XIII

The Companions of the Night

Si el Hadj Arrifa was right. When Mohammed saw Paul Ravenel ride forward out of the loom of the night into the darkness of the tunnel, bending his head so that it might not strike the roof, he missed a slight action which was much more significant. Paul slipped his right hand into his pocket and took out a heavy key. He had been seeing to it that Mohammed should draw gradually ahead, and by the time when he came opposite to the little door in the angle, Mohammed was far beyond the turn and there was not the faintest glimmer of light from the lantern. Paul slipped from his saddle, gave his horse a sharp cut across the buttocks with his riding whip, and as the startled animal galloped off, turned quickly to the little door.

He was in a darkness so complete that he could not see the key in his hand nor the hand that held it. Yet he found the keyhole at once, and in another second he was within the house. The passage in which he found himself was as black as the tunnel outside. Yet he locked the door, picked up and fitted the stout transverse bars into their sockets as neatly as though he worked in the broad noon. He had made no sound at all. Yet he had shut a door between the world and

himself, and the effort of his life now must be to keep it for ever closed. He had a queer fancy that a door thus momentously closing upon his fortunes ought to clang so loudly that the noise of it would reach across the city.

"There was once a Paul Ravenel," he said to himself.

The lantern in Mohammed's hands flickering upon the walls of the tunnel and every second dwindling a little more, receding a little more, danced before his eyes. There went the soul and spirit of that Paul Ravenel.

He was aroused from his misery by the sound of Mohammed's hands sliding curiously over the panels of the door. The cry of panic followed quickly and the clatter of the lantern upon the cobble-stones. Paul waited with his pistol in his hand wondering what had startled his attendant. But silence only ensued, and he turned away from the door into the house. At the end of a short passage he opened a second door, and stood on the threshold of a small court brightly lit and beautiful. A round pool from which a jet of water sprang and cooled the sultry air was in the centre of the white tiled floor. Wooden pillars gaily painted and gilded and ornamented in the Moorish fashion, not by carving, but by little squares and cubes and slips of wood delicately glued on in an intricate pattern, supported arches giving entrance to rooms. There was a cool sound of river water running along an open conduit waist-high against a wall; and poised in an archway across the court, with her eyes eagerly fixed upon the passage, stood Marguerite Lambert, a tender and happy smile upon her lips.

When Paul Ravenel saw her, the remorse which had been stinging him during the ride and had reached a climax of pain as he stood behind the door, was stilled. Marguerite had changed during this year. The hollows of her shoulders and throat had filled. The haggard look of apprehension had vanished from her face. Colour had come into her cheeks and gaiety into her eyes and a bright gloss upon her hair. She wore a fragile little white frock embroidered with silver which a girl might have worn at a dance in a ballroom of London or Paris; and in the exotic setting of that court she seemed to him a flame of wonder and beauty. And she was his. He held her in his arms, the softness of her cheek against his.

"Marguerite!" he said. "Each time I see you it is for the first time. How is that?" But Marguerite did not answer to his laugh. She held him off and scanned him with anxious eyes.

"Something has happened, Paul."

"No."

"When you came in, you were troubled."

"When I saw you the trouble passed. I was afraid that you might be angry. I am very late."

Marguerite did not believe one word of that explanation, but the way to discover the true one did not lie through argument. She drew Paul across the court, holding him by the hand and saying lightly:

"Foolish one, should I quarrel with you on the evening before you march away? You might never come back to me."

She led him into a side room and drew him down beside her on the thick low cushions. Upstairs there

were chairs and tables and the paraphernalia of a Western home. Here, on the level of the patio and the street, they had for prudence sake kept it all of the country. There was no brass bedstead, it is true, to ornament the room, but there were three tall grandfather clocks, though only one of them was going, and that marked the true time. Marguerite laid her head in the hollow of his shoulder and her arm went round his waist.

"Paul, you won't get killed!" she whispered. "Oh, take care, take care! I am afraid. This year has been so perfect."

"You must have been lonely many days."

"And many nights," whispered Marguerite, with a little grimace. Then she laughed with the trill of a bird. "But you had just gone or you were soon returning, and my thoughts were full of you. I am not difficult and thorny, am I, Paul? Say so! Say so at once!"

He laid her down so that her shoulders rested on his knee and her face smiled up at him, and bending he kissed her on the mouth for an answer.

"You are the most golden thing that ever happened in this world," he said. "I think of all those years that I lived through before I met you, quite contented with myself and knowing nothing—no, absolutely nothing of the great miracle."

"What miracle, Paul?"

"The miracle of man and woman—of you and me—who want to be together—who are hungry when we are not together—who walk amongst rainbows when we are."

Paul was the " grand serieux " as Gerard de Montignac had called him, warning him, too, of that very fate which had befallen him. Love of this girl had swept him off his feet, calf-love and man's love had come to him at once. Marguerite was new and entrancingly strange to him as Eve to Adam. He made much of her judgment, as lovers will, marvelling when she swept to some swift, sane decision whilst he was debating the this and the that. She entertained him one moment as though he were an audience and she a company of players ; she was the tenderest of companions the next ; in her moments of passion she made him equal with the gods ; and the pride and glory to both of them was that each had been the first to enter the heart and know the embraces of the other.

" Paul, what are you thinking about ? " she asked.

" That that's the prettiest frock I have seen you in," said he, and with a smile of pleasure she raised herself and sat at his side.

" It's the prettiest I have got," she returned.

Paul lifted a strip of the fragile skirt between his fingers.

" It's a funny thing, Marguerite," he said. " But until I knew you, I never noticed at all whether a girl was wearing a topping frock or whether she was dowdy. So long as they had something over their shoulders they were all pretty much the same to me."

" And now ? " asked Marguerite.

" Well, it's different," said Paul, disappointing her of her expected flattery. " That's all."

Marguerite laughed, as she could afford to. As she knew very well, he loved to see her straight and slim

in her fine clothes, and it gave him an entrancing little sensuous thrill to feel the delicate fabrics draping exquisitely her firm young body.

Paul, before he had set out with Colonel Gouraud's supply column on the expedition to Fez, had sent Marguerite across the Straits and up to Madrid, where a credit was opened for her at one of the banks. Paul had been afraid lest she should stint herself not only of luxuries, but of things needed. But she had answered: "Of course I'll take from you, my dear. I am proud to take from you."

She looked back upon that journey now and said:

"I had six glorious weeks in Madrid, fittings and fittings and choosing colours, and buying shoes and stockings and hats and all sorts of things. I began at half-past nine every morning and was never finished till the shops closed. I had never had any money to spend before. Oh, it was an orgy!"

"And you regret those weeks?" asked Paul, misled by the enjoyment with which she remembered them.

"Nonsense. I had more fun still when I came back with what I had bought. I was going to make myself beautiful in the eyes of my lord!" and mockingly she pushed her elbow into his side as she sat beside him.

Marguerite, upon her return, had waited for some weeks in Tangier. Paul had to make sure that he was to be stationed at Fez. Afterwards he had to find and buy this house, furnish it, and provide a staff of servants on whose fidelity he could rely. He had secured two negresses and an Algerian, an old soldier who had served with him in the Beni-Snassen campaign before he had ever come on service to Morocco. Even

when all was ready at Fez there was a further delay, since the road from Tangier to Fez was for a time unsafe.

" I was tired of waiting, long before Selim and the negress and the little escort you sent for me appeared," she said. " But the journey up country I adored."

It was early in the year. The tent villages with their hedges of cactus ; the rolling plains of turf overscattered with clumps of asphodel in flower ; the aspect of little white-walled towns tucked away high up in the folds of hills ; the bright, strong sun by day, the freshness of the nights, and the camp fires in that open and spacious country were a miracle of freedom and delight to this girl who had choked for so long in the hot and tawdry bars of the coast towns. And every step brought her nearer to her lover. It was the season of flowers. Great fields of marigold smiled at her. Yellow-striped purple iris nodded a welcome. Rosy thrift, and pale blue chicory, and little congregations of crimson poppies, and acres of wild mustard drew her on through a land of colour. And here and there on a small knoll a solitary palm overshadowed a solitary white-domed tomb.

She rode a mule, and wore the dress of a Moorish woman. All had been done secretly, even to the purchase of the house in Fez, which was held in the name of a Moorish friend of Paul's. It was Marguerite's wish from first to last. Paul would have proclaimed her from the roof-tops, had she but lifted an eyebrow. But she knew very well that it would not help Paul in his career were he to bring a pretty mistress up from the coast and parade her openly in Fez. He

would get a name for levity and indiscretion. Moreover, the secrecy was for itself delightful to her. It was to her like a new toy to a child.

"I love a secret," she had said once to Paul when he urged that her life was dull. "It sets us a little farther apart from others and a little nearer together. It will be fun keeping it up, and we shall laugh of an evening, locked safely away in the midst of Fez in our little hidden palace." It was fun, too, for Marguerite to dress herself in a fine silk caftan of pink or pale blue reaching to her feet, to pass over that the mansouriya, to slip her bare feet into little purple embroidered heelless slippers, to wind a bright scarf about her hair, to burden her ankles and arms with heavy, clashing rings of silver, to blacken her long eyelashes and veil the lower part of her face and go shopping with one of the negresses in the Souk-ben-Saffi. It was fun, also, to return home and transform herself into a fashionable girl of the day and wait in this southern patio for the coming of her lover.

"I love routine like a dog," she said on this evening. She was sitting on the low cushion by Paul's side. Her slim legs, showing pink through the fine white silk of her stockings, were stretched out in front of her. She contemplated the tips of her small white satin slippers. "I don't want any more surprises," and Paul's face grew for a moment grave, and twitched with a stab of pain. "I don't want any more people. I have had enough of both. I love going up on the roof and watching the great upper city of women, and wondering what's going on in the narrow streets at the bottom of the deep chasms between the houses. I have books,

too, and work when I'm not too lazy to do it, and I am learning the little two-stringed guitar, and I want one person, one foolish, dear person, and since I've got him I'm very happy."

Paul reached forward, and, closing a hand round one of her ankles, shook it tenderly.

" Listen to me, Marguerite ! " he began, but she was upon her feet in an instant. She snatched up Paul's *képi* and cocked it jauntily on her curls.

" Canada ! " she cried, in a sharp, manly voice, and saluted, bringing her high heels together with a click and standing very stiff and upright. She hummed the tune of " The Maple Leaf," interpolating noises meant to parody the instruments of an orchestra, and she marched in front of Paul and round the patio quickly and briskly, like a girl in a pantomime procession, until she came back to her starting-point.

" Australia ! "

Again she saluted, and marched round to the tune of " Australia Will be There."

" The U-nited States of America ! " she announced, and this time she skimmed round the patio in a sort of two-step dance, swift as a bird, and her white and silver frock glinting and rippling as she moved.

" Yankee Doodle went to town
Upon a little pony,"

she sang, and she returned to her starting-point.

" Great Britain ! " she cried.

Here she saluted for a long time, while marking time and calling out in a gruff voice : " One, two, one two ! Can't you girls keep time ? Miss Montmorenci, you've

a ladder in your stocking, and if you think anyone is going to take the trouble to climb up it, you flatter yourself. Miss de Bourbon, you haven't marked your face, and it can do with a lot ! " and off she went to the tune of " The British Grenadiers." When she came opposite to Paul again she held out her short skirt on each side, dropped a low curtsy, and declared :

" And that, ladies and gentlemen, will conclude our entertainment for this evening."

It was to conclude their entertainment for many and many an evening, for whilst Paul laughed and applauded, from right above their heads it seemed, a voice, vibrant and loud and clear, dropped its call to prayer through the open roof of the court.

" Allah Akbar ! God is above all. There is no God but God, and Mohammed is his prophet. Rise and pray ! Rise and do the thing that is good. There is no God but God ! "

It was the same voice to which Si el Hadj Arrifa was listening in another quarter of the city. Paul's house was built in the very shadow of the Karouein Mosque, and the voice pealing from its high minaret in the silence of the night, familiar though both Marguerite and he were with it, never failed to startle them. It was a voice deep, resonant, a voice of music and majesty.

" The Companions of the Sick ! " said Paul, as they listened to it without moving, caught in the spell of its beauty.

" There are ten of them," said Marguerite. " Like all the rank and fashion of Fez, I set my clocks by their voices."

"Yes, ten," Paul explained. "Ben Hayoun, a rich man, lay very ill in this city, and night after night he could get no sleep. The silence became terrible to him. He felt an appalling sense of loneliness as the hours dragged by and not a sound varied them. So, when he recovered, he founded this order of ten mueddins, each of whom must chant the summons to prayer for a half of one of the five hours which precede the dawn, so that those in pain shall be no more alone. They call them the companions of the sick."

Marguerite looked up to the open roof and the stars above it.

"I often wonder what they think when they look down upon this bright square of light beneath them: whether they speculate who live here and why they stay up so late of nights. I fancy sometimes that the mueddin is looking down and watching us as we move about the court."

She stood for a moment gazing upwards, and then her mood changed.

"One o'clock," she cried, and, running to the clock against the wall, she opened the glass which protected its face and adjusted the hands. "Paul, I'll give you a whisky and soda, and you must go."

She turned to him, trying to laugh gaily, but her voice broke.

"You have to be on parade at six, and you have miles to go before you reach your camp." Her gaiety deserted her altogether. She flung herself into his arms and clung to him, pressing her face against his coat. "Oh, my dear, when shall I see you again? I wish that you weren't going. Yes, I do! Though I

pretend to laugh and to think nothing of it when I am with you, I have been praying for a week with all my heart that something might happen to keep you here."

"Something has happened," said Paul.

Marguerite lifted her face.

"You are not going?"

"No."

"Paul, Paul!" she cried joyfully. But there was a look on his face which dashed her joy. Marguerite was quick in those days to fall from a high buoyancy of spirit to forebodings and alarm. This miracle of her happiness was balanced on so fine a needle point that sometime it must drop and break into a thousand useless, shining splinters. "Why aren't you going?" she asked suspiciously.

"Because of the rain." Paul Ravenel explained. "The departure of the Mission is postponed for three days."

"Only for three days?" Marguerite repeated, with a wistful droop of the corners of her mouth.

"It won't leave after three days," said Paul. "It won't leave Fez for a long while."

He spoke very gravely, and after a moment of silence Marguerite disengaged herself gently from his embrace. A trace of the haggard look which had once been so familiar upon her face was visible there again, so visible that Paul wondered whether some hint of the threatened massacre had not been given to her by Selim or the negresses.

"Yes, you were in great trouble when you came into the court to-night, and when I asked you why, you put me off with an excuse. The truth now, Paul,

please!" she pleaded, though she caught her breath at the thought of what the truth might mean to her.

"You have courage, Marguerite."

The girl's eyelids closed and fluttered over her eyes.

"I shall need it?"

"Yes."

She sank down upon the cushions, for her knees had given under her. Paul did not understand the real cause of her distress until she took his hand between both of hers and spoke.

"You needn't hesitate, my dear. Of course, I have always lived in fear that our life together couldn't go on. In my happiest moments, deep down, I have felt that dread. Perfection's not allowed, is it? There's a jealousy that will shatter it. I was sure of that. But I always hoped—not yet. I always prayed for a little longer time to make up for the wretched years before."

If trouble was mentioned to Marguerite Lambert in those days, she had just the one interpretation of the word It meant separation from Paul, and therefore the ending of all things. Her passion occupied her, heart and brain and blood. She had waited for it, curiously certain that she would not be denied it. Now that the great gift was hers, she was in a desperate alarm lest she should wake one morning to discover that it had been filched from her in the night. Paul dropped down upon the cushions at her side, and, with a tender laugh, drew away her hands from her face.

"Marguerite, you are foolish. It isn't separation, of course. You haven't to fear that—no, nor ever

will have to. Believe me, Marguerite! Look at me and say you believe me!"

He turned her face towards him and held it between his hands, and her eyes lost their trouble and smiled at him.

"That's right. Now listen, Marguerite!"

He gave her a little shake. For, since she knew that the one evil which she dreaded was not to befall her, she had ceased to attend.

"I am listening, Paul."

"I dined with a friend of mine to-night. I went there to leave him a letter of instructions about you if anything happened to me on our march down the coast."

"Happened to you?" she exclaimed, with a sharp intake of her breath.

"I expected an attack. Si el Hadj Arrifa would have seen that you were sent safely down to the coast. My agents there would have taken care of you. You would, of course, never want for anything again."

"I should want for everything," said Marguerite slowly. "I don't think, Paul, that I could go on living—I was told of a girl—when her husband died, she dressed herself in her wedding gown—I couldn't do that, my dear," she interpolated, with a little whimsical smile. "Then she lay down on her bed and took poison—I often think of that girl."

"Marguerite, you shouldn't. It's morbid. You are young. Even if I went——" but there came a stubborn look upon Marguerite Lambert's face against which he was well aware his finest arguments would beat in vain. "I'll discuss that with you when it's

necessary," he said. " To-night my friend, Si el Hadj Arrifa, warned me that not only was the Mission to be attacked on its way to the coast, but that there would also be a rising here."

He had Marguerite's attention now. She looked at him with startled eyes.

" In Fez ? "

" Yes."

" That will mean—— ? "

" Yes, let us face it. A massacre."

Marguerite shivered and caught Paul's hand. She looked about the court outside the lighted room in which they sat. There were shadowy corners which daunted her. She looked upwards, straining her ears. But the ceaseless chant of the mueddin on the minaret of the Karouein Mosque alone broke the silence of the night.

" When is it to be ? " she whispered, as though the fanatics were already gathered about her door.

" To-night, probably. To-morrow, certainly."

" And you can trust your friend's word ? "

" As I would trust yours," said Paul.

Marguerite drew closer to her lover and huddled against him. He put his arm about her. She was trembling. The fun of the masquerade was over. She wondered now how, without fear, she could have wandered with her black servant through the narrow, crowded markets and in those deep, maze-like streets ; she pictured to herself the men : furtive, sleek Fasi ; wild creatures from the hills with long muskets gleaming with mother-of-pearl ; brawny men of the people ; and she painted their faces with the colours and the

fire of fury and fanaticism. This little house shut in and crowded about with a thousand houses! She had thought of it as a secret palace hidden away in the uncharted centre of a maze. Now it seemed to her a trap set in a jungle of tigers—a trap in which she and Paul were caught. And her thoughts suddenly took a turn. No, only she was in that trap.

She listened, turning her face upwards to the open roof. The city was still quiet.

"Paul, there are other Christians scattered in houses in the town."

"Yes."

"Couldn't you give a warning? So that troops from the camp might be hurried into the town? Leave your uniform here! Dress in your djellaba and your Moorish clothes. You can reach headquarters——"

"I have already been there. They will not believe," said Paul.

Marguerite thought for a little while, summoning her strength to assist her, and the memory of the great debt she owed her lover.

"Very well," she said. "You have done all that you can. You must go back to the camp now, Paul, while you still can."

"No."

"I shall be all right, Paul. No one suspects this house. You have always been careful when you came here that the tunnel was empty. At the worst I have the little Belgian automatic pistol you gave me."

"No," Paul repeated.

"But your place is in the camp with your men."

"I have leave," said Paul. "I applied for leave the moment I knew that we had three days more in Fez."

Marguerite did not for a moment doubt the truth of what he said. He spoke so simply. It was so natural a thing that he should ask for leave. She gave up the little scheme to which she had steeled her heart. Her arms crept about his neck.

"There!" she whispered, with a sigh of relief. "I have tried to send you away, haven't I? I have done my best and you won't go! I am glad, Paul, I am glad! Alone I should have shivered in terror."

"We shall be together, Marguerite."

Her lips trembled to a smile. Danger thus encountered seemed in the anticipation hardly to be considered a danger at all.

"Listen," she said, lifting her hand.

The voice of another mueddin now rang out across the city. Marguerite rose.

"This lighted square just above our heads, Paul, is just beneath his feet. Let us give him no cause to wonder."

She put out the candles and returned to Paul Ravenel's side. They sat together in the darkness huddled against one another, whilst the Companions of the Sick followed one another upon the high minaret of the Karouein Mosque.

Once, twice, when some stray cries broke the silence, Paul whispered eagerly:

"It is beginning"; and as silence followed upon the cries, "No! No!" he added in a dull voice, a voice of disappointment.

"Paul, you wish it to begin!" said Marguerite in wonder; and she tried to distinguish the expression of his face, even though the darkness showed her nothing but the silhouette of his head.

"It will be the sooner over," said Paul quickly. "The revolt can't last long in any case. There's a strong column in the field just south of Meknes. A call from the wireless and four days will bring them here."

But there was another reason why with all his soul he prayed to hear the still night break up in a clatter of firing and fierce cries. If the revolt began to-night, why, then, he himself had been caught in it, had been forced to seek a refuge, had been unable to regain his post. Who could gainsay him? All was saved—Marguerite and honour too. Whereas if the morning came and Fez was still at peace and his appointed place empty—then some other man must fill it. But the voices on the minaret rang out in music above their heads, until Marguerite said: "This is the last. It is he who raises the flag over the mosque. In half an hour we shall have the dawn."

CHAPTER XIV

The Tunic

"Marguerite, you must go to bed," said Paul. "I'll rouse you if there's any danger."

It was very near to the dawn now. There was a freshness and an expectation in the air; a faint colourless light was invading the darkness; in the patch of sky above their heads the bright stars were swooning. For most of this last half-hour Marguerite's head had lain heavy upon his shoulder, and if she opened her eyes it was only to close them again with a sigh of content. Paul lifted her on to her feet and led her up the stairs.

"And you, Paul?" she asked drowsily.

"I shall be within call. I shall sleep for a little on the cushions below. Good night."

Marguerite noticed that the voice of the last mueddin ceased whilst she was still preparing herself for her bed; and after she had got into it she heard a kettle singing cheerfully in the court below, as if Paul were brewing for himself some tea. Then, with the doors of her bedroom open upon the little gallery above the court, she went fast asleep.

Hours afterwards a shattering noise awakened her. She lay for a few moments deliciously poised between sleep and consciousness, and vaguely thinking her long

and troubled vigil to have been a nightmare which the light of day had happily dispelled. The sunlight was falling in a sheet of gold through the open roof. "It must be very late," she reflected lazily, and thereupon sharply and crisply two shots from a rifle split the air. Marguerite sprang up in her bed with a hand to her heart, as though one of those shots had wounded her. It was just the same noise which had broken through her slumbers. The nightmare was true, then! She listened, resting upon one arm with her face turned towards the open doors. A clamour of voices was borne from a distance to her ears. The new Terror had begun.

"Paul!" she cried loudly. "Paul!" And a tall man, dressed in the robes of a Moor, stood beside her bed. It was not until he smiled that she recognised her lover.

"You had better get up, Marguerite," he said, and bending down, he kissed her. "You have slept well, thank the Lord!"

One of the negresses brought her a cup of tea, and Marguerite, slipping on her dressing-gown, sat upon the edge of the bed and thrust her feet into her slippers.

"What is the time, Paul?"

"A little past one."

"So late?"

"I let you sleep. There was no disturbance. The first shot fired waked you."

"I will be quick," she said, or rather began to say. For the words, half uttered, were frozen upon her lips. Such a din, so shrill, so menacing and strange,

burst out above their heads that Marguerite cowered down under it as under the thrust of a blow. She had never heard the like of it; she hoped never to hear the like of it again; yet she was to hear it now for days—the swift repetition of one strident note, swelling and falling in a pæan of wild inhuman triumph. Marguerite imagined all the birds of prey in the world wheeling and screaming above the city; or a thousand thin voices shrieking in a madhouse: *You—you—you—you.* The piercing clamour ran swift as the clacking of a mitrailleuse and with a horrid ferocity which made the girl's blood run cold.

"Paul," she said, "what is it?"

"The women on the roofs."

"Oh!"

Marguerite shuddered as she listened, clutching tight her lover's arm. Such a promise of cruelty was in those shrill cries as made Marguerite think of the little automatic pistol in the drawer of her table as a talisman which she must henceforth carry close to her hand. She felt that even if she escaped from the peril of these days, she could never walk again in the narrow streets between the blind houses without the chill of a great fear. Her clasp tightened upon her lover's arm, and he winced sharply. Marguerite looked up into his face, and saw that his lips were pressed close together to prevent a cry of pain.

"Paul!" she said wonderingly. She loosened her clasp and turned back the sleeve of his djellaba. Beneath it his forearm was roughly but tightly bandaged. "Oh, my dear," she cried in a voice of compunction, "what happened to you whilst I slept?

You are wounded—and for me! Must I always do you harm?" and she beat her hands together in her distress.

"It was an accident," said Paul.

"An accident?" She ran to her medicine chest, and making him sit beside her, unfastened the bandage. "An accident?" she repeated. It looked to her as if he had been stabbed. A knife had been driven right through the flesh of his forearm. Paul did not reply to her exclamations, and she did not press her questions. She washed and dressed the wound and bound it up again. "It must hurt terribly," she said, her forehead knitted in distress.

"It is easier now," he answered. "The knife was clean."

"You are sure of that, Paul?"

"Quite."

She made a sling for his arm and sent him away. She dressed quickly, wondering how that wound had been inflicted and why he wished not to explain it. Surely he had not gone out whilst she slept? Surely there had been no attack upon the house? No! But she was plunged now into a world of mystery and fear, and she wrung her hands in an impotent despair.

They took their breakfast in a room upon the first floor, Paul asking questions as to how far the house was provisioned, and Marguerite answering almost at random, whilst the cries of the women rang shrill overhead.

"Oh, yes, there is food," she answered.

"We can always send Selim out," he added.

Marguerite's eyes lightened.

"We will send him out, Paul!" she exclaimed. "Do you know what has been troubling me? We haven't a window upon any street. We are here at the bottom of a well with nothing but our ears to warn us of danger. We can see nothing."

Paul looked at her anxiously. She was nervous, the flutter of her hands feverish, and her voice running up and down the scale as though she had no control over it. Paul reached across the table and laid his hand upon her arm.

"You poor little girl!" he said gently. "These are trying days. But there won't be many. The wireless here will have got into touch already with Moinier's column near Meknes. The troops, too, at Dar Debibagh may do something," and ever so slightly his voice faltered when he spoke of the troops, yet not so slightly but that Marguerite noticed it. "They have some guns," he went on hurriedly, and again Marguerite noticed the hurry, the desire to cover up and hide that little spasm of pain which had stabbed him when he thought of his men. "Yes, the guns!" he said. "There will be an end of that infernal twittering on the roof-tops when the guns begin to talk."

"Paul, you should have been with your men," said Marguerite, and he answered her with a kind of violent obstinacy which drew her eyes in one swift glance to his face.

"I am on leave."

He changed his tone, however, immediately.

"We will send Selim into the town for news," he said cheerfully, "and we will go up on to the roof."

Selim was bidden to knock twice, and after a tiny interval once more, upon his return. Paul stood behind the door listening to make sure that the tunnel was empty before he opened it. Then he let him go and locked and barred the door again.

"Come," he said to Marguerite, and picking up some cushions they went upstairs to the roof. Marguerite had followed Paul's example and was dressed in Moorish clothes. The house was higher by a story than any which adjoined it, and the roof itself was enclosed in a parapet waist-high. They crouched upon the cushions behind the wall and cautiously looked over it.

A pack of clouds was threatening in the west, but just now the city glittered in the sunlight with its hanging gardens and high terraces, its white houses huddling down the hill-side like a flock of sheep, and the bright green tiles of its mosques. Paul and Marguerite never tired of this aspect of the lovely city shut within its old crumbling walls and musical with the rushing noise of its many rivers. But to-day they saw it as they had never seen it before. For the roofs were crowded with women in their coloured robes of gauze and bright scarves, who danced and screamed and climbed from one house to another on little ladders in such a frenzy of excitement that the eyes were dazzled and the ears deafened. Paul turned towards the north. Upon the roof of one house men were breaking through with axes and picks, whilst others flung down rags and sticks which had been soaked in paraffin and lighted, through the holes into the rooms below.

"I think that's the house of the French veterinary surgeon!" said Paul; and from the court beneath there rose a continuous rattle of firing. "Look!" said Paul, and he nodded to the south.

Here there was a gap between the houses, and Marguerite could see far below a tumbledown stone bridge built in a steep arch across a stream. As she looked, a wild horde of men swarmed upon the bridge capering and yelling.

"There are soldiers among them," said Marguerite. "I can see their rifles and their bandoliers."

"Yes, the Askris who have revolted," answered Paul, and suddenly he covered Marguerite's eyes with the palm of his hand. "Don't look!" But Marguerite had already seen, and she sank down behind the parapet with a moan.

In the midst of that wild procession some rifles with bayonets fixed were held aloft, and on the bayonets the trunk and the limbs of a man were impaled. The head was carried last of all, and upon a pole taller than the bayonets—a head black with blood like a negro's, on which a gold-laced *képi* was derisively cocked.

Paul swore underneath his breath.

"One of my brothers," he whispered. "O my God!" and dropping his head into his hands, he rocked his body to and fro in an agony of remorse.

Marguerite touched him on the shoulder.

"Paul, there's a carbine in your room."

"It would be fatal to use it."

"I don't care," Marguerite cried fiercely. Her face was alive with passion. "Use it, Paul. I don't

care!" And from far below there rose the sound of a loud knocking upon a door.

Marguerite's heart fluttered up into her throat. She stared at Paul with her eyes opened wide in horror. The same thought was in both their minds. Both listened, holding their breath that they might hear the better

"It was upon our door they knocked," Marguerite whispered, and she crept a little closer to her lover.

"Listen!" replied Paul, and as the knocking began again, but this time louder, he added with a grim look upon his face, "Yes."

"And it was not Selim who knocked," said Marguerite.

They could hear cries now, angry orders to open. A muffled clamour and such a clatter of heavy blows as shook the very house.

"I must go down," said Paul in a low voice. "Otherwise they'll break in the door."

Marguerite nodded. Her face was white to the lips, but she was quite still now and her eyes steady. They crept down to the uppermost floor of the house. The noise was louder.

"You will stay here, Marguérite."

"Yes."

"You have your pistol?"

Marguerite drew it from her broad waist-belt of gold brocade, snapped back the barrel, and set the safety-catch. Her hand never shook. Now that the peril was at her elbow she could even smile. Paul took her passionately in his arms.

" You are gold all through, Marguerite," he cried. " If this is the end, I thank you a thousand times. I would hate to have died without knowing the wonder of such rare love as yours."

" ' We two embracing under Death's spread hand.' "

She quoted from a book upon her shelf in which she was pleased to find a whole library of wisdom and inspiration.

" You will wait until the last moment," said Paul, touching the little automatic in her hand.

" Until they are on this last flight of stairs," she replied in an even voice. " Paul ! " she clung to him for a second, not in terror, but as to some inestimable treasure which she could hardly let go. Then she stood away, her eyes shining like the dew, her face hallowed with tenderness. " Now, my dear, go ! "

Paul Ravenel ran down the stairs. The clamour echoing from the tunnel had taken on a fiercer note ; the door, stout as it was, bent inwards under the blows. Marguerite, standing upon the landing, heard him unbolt the door. She drew back out of sight as a crowd of men, some in djellabas spotted with blood, some in ragged caftans, some armed with rifles, others with curved knives, others again with sharpened poles, swept screaming like madmen over the court.

" The Frenchman ! " cried a great fellow, brandishing a butcher's cleaver. " Give him to us ! God has willed that they shall all die this day.

What had become of Paul ? she wondered. Had

he been swept off his feet and trampled down in the rush? She heard his voice above the clamour. She imagined him standing with uplifted hand, claiming silence. At all events, silence followed, and then his voice rang out.

"God willed that he should die yesterday," said Paul.

Marguerite peered out between the curtains which overhung the entrance to the room. She saw him move, calm and smiling, across the court to an alcove and point to a corner.

"The Frenchman came to my house once too often. Look! He sought refuge here last night. He was not wise to seek refuge in the house of Ben-Sedira the Meknasi. For to-day his body rolls in the river——" Paul threw open a small door in the back wall and showed them the Karouein river tumbling, swollen with the rain, past the walls of his house. Then he pointed to the alcove. "And his livery lies there."

There was a rush into the alcove, and the shouts of exultation broke out again. A blue tunic, on the breast of which medals glinted and rattled, was tossed out high amidst the throng. The tunic was gashed and all cluttered and stained with blood, which had dried. Paul's gold-laced cap spun through the air, was caught and clapped upon the head of a boy, his breeches and boots and accoutrements were flung from hand to hand and shared out amidst laughter and cheering. And once more there was a surge of men and the court was empty and silent. No, not quite empty. Paul was talking in a gentle voice to

one wild man who was now wearing over a ragged caftan his uniform tunic. Paul held him firmly by the elbow, and was speaking in a curiously soft, smooth voice, than which Marguerite had never heard anything more menacing.

" You will leave that tunic, good friend. You will take it off at once and leave it here. It is my trophy. Have I not earned it ? "

The man protested, and sought to disengage himself, but Paul still held him firmly.

" It shall hang in my house," he continued, " that my children may remember how once there were Frenchmen befouling the holy ground of Morocco."

Once more Marguerite heard the rattle of the medals as the coat was restored and the Moor cry out : " There will be none alive in Fez this night. *Salem, aleikum,* O man of Meknes ! " And a little afterwards the door was slammed and barred.

Paul returned to the court holding the tunic in his hands. The peril of the last few moments was swept altogether out of his mind. For a moment Marguerite herself was forgotten. He was holding the badge of many years of honourable service, and the shining medals which proved that the service had been of real value to the country he served. All was now wasted and foregone.

" I should make the sacrifice again," he said obstinately to himself, " if it were to make again. I should ! I should ! "

But he had not borne to see the tunic and its medals paraded in triumph on the back of one of these assassins through the streets of Fez. When he stopped the

Moor and held him back from his companions, his hand had gripped close the revolver hidden in his waistband. Had the man clung to the tunic, Paul would have killed, whatever the risk. The traditions and the whole training of his life had forced his hand. He knew that, as he stood in the silent sunlit patio fondling the stuff of the coat between his fingers, and his heart aching as though some little snake had slipped into his bosom and was feeding there.

"I have done what my father did," he thought. "I who set out to atone for him." And he laughed aloud with so much mockery at his own pretensions that the laughter startled him. "I can plead a different reason. But what of that? I have done what my father did!"

He folded the tunic reverently and laid it down again in the alcove. As he stood up he was startled by the clatter of something falling overhead and the sharp explosion of a pistol. He looked upwards. The sound had come from behind those curtains where Marguerite was hidden. Had she been watching? Had she seen him fondling the tunic? Had she heard his bitter laughter? Perhaps he had spoken aloud. For a moment his heart stood still. Some words that Henriette had said to him—oh, ever so long ago, in the Villa Iris—flashed back into his mind: "Even if the grand passion comes—oh, la, la la!—she will blow her brains out, the little fool!"

He sprang up the stairs, crying "Marguerite! Marguerite!" and stumbling in his haste. No answer was returned to him. He tore the curtains aside, and saw her lying on the floor by the side of a divan.

The pistol had slipped from her hand and fallen a little way from her. Paul flung himself upon his knees beside her, lifted her and pressed her close to his heart. "Marguerite! Marguerite!" he whispered. There was no wound and she was breathing, and in a moment or two her eyes opened. Paul understood in that supreme moment of relief how greatly his love of Marguerite overpowered his grief at honour lost.

"Oh, my dear, you frightened me!" he said.

She smiled as he lifted her on to the divan.

"I was foolish," she answered.

She had waited upon the outcome of that wild scene in the court below, her nerves steady, her mind unconscious of any effort to steel herself against catastrophe. She could catch but a glimpse of what was going forward; she did not understand the trick by which Paul Ravenel had appeased the invaders; she heard the wild babble of their frenzied voices and Paul's voice overtopping them. She had waited serenely with her little pistol in her hand, safety to be reached so easily by the mere pressure of a finger. Then suddenly all was over; the court was empty, the house which had rung with fury a moment since was silent; and as she heard the bolts of the door shot once more into their sockets her strength had melted away. She had stood for a little while in a daze, and catching at the divan as she fell, had slipped in a swoon to the floor. The pistol fell from her hand and exploded as it fell.

"I was foolish," she repeated. "I didn't understand what had happened. I don't even now."

"I was afraid that some time or another someone

had seen me enter this house and remembered it," Paul Ravenel explained. "Last night something happened outside the door—what, I don't know, but enough to trouble me a little. So after you had gone to bed I boiled a kettle——"

"Yes, I heard it."

"And sterilised my big knife. I drove the knife through my arm and let the blood soak my tunic, and then I stabbed the tunic again in the back. It was lucky that I did."

"What should I have done without you?" she said as she rested upon the cushions of the divan. She laid a hand gently in his.

"Does the wound hurt, Paul?"

"It throbs a little if I move it; that's all. It's nothing."

"I'll dress it again to-night," she said sleepily, and almost immediately she fell asleep. She slept so deeply that a muffled roar which shook the house did not even trouble her dreams.

Paul smiled as he heard that sound. "That's one of the seventy-fives," he reflected. The guns from the camp at Dar-Debibagh were coming into action.

He left Marguerite sleeping and climbed again to the roof. The guns were firing to the south of the town, and were still far away. But no man who had fought through the Chaiovia campaign could ever forget the tribesmen's terror of the guns.

"Another day or two!"

Paul counted up the stages of the march of Moinier's column from Meknes. If only he was quick, so that the tribesmen could not mass between him and Fez!

There were houses alight now in Fez-el-Bali. The work of massacre was going on. But let General Moinier hurry, and the guns over there at Dar-Debibagh talk insistently to Fez! Moreover, at five o'clock the rain began again. It fell like javelins with the thunder of surf upon a beach.

CHAPTER XV

On the Roof-top

Marguerite drove her two trembling negresses out of the corners into which they had flown when the house was invaded, stood over them while they cooked the dinner, and strictly ordered that it should be served with the proper ceremonies. She dressed herself in her European clothes and with even more to-night of the scrupulous daintiness which was habitual to her. Paul watched her with a great pride and wonderment.

"How in the world do you know at once what we have to learn?" he asked. "When people are rattled, routine's the great remedy. Just doing the ordinary things at the ordinary hours lifts you along with a sort of assurance that life is going to be as sane to-morrow as it was yesterday. But we have men to watch, and they teach us these things. Where do you get them from?"

"From myself," answered Marguerite, with a blush upon her cheeks which her lover's praise never failed to provoke. "I had to keep my own little flag of courage flying if I could."

At half-past nine they heard Selim's three knocks upon the outer door, and Paul let him in and brought him to Marguerite in the room opening on to the

patio. He brought with him a budget of black news. A couple of officers had been dragged from their horses and butchered in the streets. An engineer and his wife in Fez Djedid had been shot down as they sat at their luncheon. There had been an attack upon the Hotel de France, where the manageress and a priest had been slain.

"There is a house in the Tala quarter," said Paul, "where the veterinary surgeons and two other officers lodged. I saw men breaking through the roof to get at them this afternoon."

"They escaped, Sidi. They let themselves down from a window into an alley. It is believed that they are hiding in a covered drain."

"And the four French telegraph operators? They, too, occupied a house in the Tala."

Selim had no good tidings to tell of them. The door of their house had been forced at midday. Throughout the afternoon they had resisted in an upper room which they had barricaded, firing with what weapons they had until their ammunition was exhausted. At seven in the evening a rescue party had arrived, but only one of them was alive, and he grievously wounded.

"A rescue party?" asked Paul, wondering whence that party had come. There were not enough men at the head-quarters in the hospital to do more than protect the quarter of the Consulates, even if they could do that.

"A battalion from Dar-Debibagh forced its way into the city at five o'clock this afternoon," said Selim.

Paul's face took life, his eyes kindled. No one

knew better than he the difficulties which must have hampered that exploit.

" That was well done," he cried. " Whose battalion ? "

The old Algerian soldier replied :

" The Commandant Philipot's."

The gladness died out of Paul Ravenel's face, and he sat in silence staring at the tiles of the floor. To Marguerite it was as though the light of a lamp waned and flickered out. She laid her hand upon his.

" That's your battalion, Paul ? "

Paul nodded and whispered " Yes," not trusting his voice overmuch.

" You should have been with it, my dear. But for me, you would have led your company," she said remorsefully ; and he cried out aloud suddenly in a voice which she had never heard him use before, a voice rough and violent and full of pain :

" I am on leave."

Hearing him, she felt the compunction of one who has carelessly knocked against a throbbing wound. Her eyes went swiftly to his face. During these moments Paul Ravenel was off his guard, and she was looking upon a man in torture.

" The little Praslin will be leading my company," he said, " and leading it just as well as I could have done." He turned again to Selim. " Did the battalion have trouble to get through ? "

" Great trouble, Sidi. The commandant tried to come in by the little gate in the Aguedal wall and the new gardens of the Sultan, but he was attacked by a swarm of men issuing from the Segma Gate on his

left flank and by sharpshooters on the wall itself in front of him."

"And we taught them to shoot!" cried Paul in exasperation. "The commandant was held up?"

"Yes, Sidi."

"What then? He was losing men, and quickly. What did he do?" Paul asked impatiently. His own men were under fire. He had got to know, and at once. "Out with it, Selim. What did the Commandant Philipot do?"

"He led his battalion down into the bed of the River Zitoun," said Selim, and a long "Oh!" of admiration and relief from Paul welcomed the manœuvre. He spread an imaginary map of the difficult ground at that south-west corner of the city, outside the walls. Pressed hardly upon his left flank, at the mercy of the riflemen on the crest of the high unscalable wall of the Aguedal, Commandant Philipot, leaving a rear-guard—trust the Commandant Philipot for that!—had disappeared with his battalion into the earth. Paul chuckled as he thought of it—the ingenuity and the audacity too!

"He made for the Bab-el-Hadij," he said.

"Yes," answered Selim.

There had been risk, of course, risk of the gravest kind. Out of shot the battalion certainly was—out of shot and out of sight. But on the other hand, in the deep chasm of the Oued Zitoun, it could not see any more than could its antagonists. If its rear-guard was overwhelmed by the insurgents from the Segma Gate! If a strong band of tribesmen rode up to the southern lip of the chasm, and caught the battalion

floundering below amongst the boulders and the swollen river! Why, there was an end of that battalion and, for the moment, of the relief of Fez. But he had got through—there was the fact. And by no other way and with no smaller risk could he have got through. Paul Ravenel, watching that unprinted map upon the floor, over which he bent, had no doubt upon that point. A great risk nobly taken for a great end, and adroitly imagined! And with what speed they must have covered that difficult ground!

"Well, the little Praslin would lead very well," he said aloud, but with just a hint of effort in his cordiality. "He knows his work."

"And you are on leave, Paul?"

Marguerite was watching her lover with startled eyes. But Paul noticed neither her look nor the urgent appeal of her voice. He was away with his company in the bed of the Oued Zitoun, now stumbling over the great stones, now flung down headlong by the rush of the rain-swollen torrent and pressing on again in the hurried march. He sat tracing with his finger on the tiles the convolutions of the river, the point where the battalion must leave its shelter and march through the gardens to the gates—lost to all else. And Marguerite, watching him, caught at any reason which could reassure her.

Of course Paul was unconsciously expressing the regret of a true soldier that his company had gone upon difficult and hazardous service without him; and a soldier's interest in a brilliant manœuvre successfully accomplished. His absorption meant no more than that. But—but—his cry, "I am on leave," startled

out of him, a challenge, an obstinate defiance, harsh with pain, rang in her ears still, argue as she might. In spite of herself, an appalling suspicion flickered like lightning through her mind and went out—and flickered again.

She heard Paul asking questions of Selim, and Selim answering. But she was asking of herself a question which made all other questions of little significance. If her suspicion were true, could his love for her remain? Could it live strongly and steadily after so enormous a sacrifice? Wouldn't it die in contempt of himself and hatred of her? If Paul Ravenel had looked at Marguerite Lambert at this moment he would have seen the haggard dancing girl of the Villa Iris, as he had seen her under the grape-vine of the balcony with her seven francs clenched in her hand.

Paul, however, was giving his attention to Selim. The quarter of the hospitals and the Consulates was now thought to be safe, though the Moors, uplifted by their success, had planned to attack it that night. An attempt had been made by a company of Philipot's battalion to force the Souk-Ben-Safi and its intricate narrow streets, but the company had been driven back. A second company had been sent out to capture and hold the Bab-el-Mahroud, but it was now beleaguered and fighting for its life. Another section was at the Bab Fetouh in the south of the town, under fire from the small mosque of Tamdert. A good many isolated Europeans had been rescued from their houses and brought into the protected quarter, but Fez, as a whole, was still in the hands of the insurgents.

At this point Paul Ravenel broke in with a sharp question :

" You spoke to no one of this house ? "

Selim shook his head.

" To no one, Sidi."

" To none of the French soldiers ? To no friend of the French ? You are sure, Selim ? You are very sure ? There were no Europeans to be rescued from this house ! Answer me truthfully ! "

Never was question more insistently pressed. Why ? Why ? Why ? . . . Marguerite found herself asking whilst her heart sank. That their secret might still be kept, its sweetness preserved for them ? No ; that reason was inadequate. Why, then ? Because the danger was over ? But it was not over. So much Selim had made very clear. The few troops had been withdrawn to the protected quarter of the Consulates. The detachments outside were hard put to it. The city of Fez was still in the hands of the insurgents. Why, then ? Why the eagerness that the French should know nothing of this secret house ? Oh, there was an answer, dared she but listen to it ! An answer with consequences as yet only dimly suspected. If it was the true answer ! Marguerite sat stunned. How was she to get away quite by herself that she might think her problem out, without betraying the trouble of her mind to Paul ?

It was Paul himself who made escape easy for her He dismissed Selim, and said to Marguerite :

" I'll go up on the roof, my dear, for a little while. The rain has stopped, but dressed as you are it wouldn't be wise for you to come."

The excuse was feeble, and he spoke looking away from Marguerite—a rare thing with him. But Marguerite welcomed the excuse and had no eyes for the shifty look of him as he made it.

"Very well," she said in a dull voice, and Paul went quickly up the stairs.

Selim's story had moved him to the depths of his soul. He was conscious of an actual nausea. "I should make the sacrifice again." He repeated a phrase which had been growing familiar to him during this day, repeated it with a stubborn emphasis. But he was beginning to understand dimly what the sacrifice was to cost him. Soldiering was his business in life. He was sealed to it. He had known it when he stood in his father's death-room on the islet off the coast of Spain, and when he sat over Colonel Vanderfelt's wine in the dining-room looking out upon the moonlit garden; but never so completely as now, when his thoughts were with the men of his company stumbling in the river-bed, and his feet were dragging up the stairs to the roof.

"I must be alone for a little while. Otherwise Marguerite will guess the truth."

It was an instinct rather than a formulated thought which drove him upwards. He dreaded Marguerite's swift intuitions, that queer way she had of reaching certainty, cleaving her way to it like a bird through the air. He drew a long breath as he crept out upon the roof. He was alone now, and sinking down upon the cushions underneath the parapet, he wrestled with his grief, letting it have its way up here in the darkness so that he might confine it the more surely

afterwards. For an hour on this first night of the revolt he remained alone upon the roof-top, whilst Marguerite, separated from him by the height of the beleaguered house, sat amongst the lighted candles in the room by the court, steeling herself to a sacrifice which should equal his.

When she was sure of herself she wrapped a dark cloak about her shining frock, and climbed in her turn to the roof. But she moved very silently, and when she raised her head above the trap she saw her lover stretched upon the terrace, his turban thrown aside, his face buried in his arms, his whole attitude one of almost Oriental grief. He was unaware of her until she crouched by his side and, with something maternal in the loving pity of her hands, gently stroked his head.

" Paul ! " she whispered, and he sprang swiftly up. She got a glimpse of a tortured face, and then he dropped by her side, and putting his arms about her, caught her to his heart.

" My dear ! My dear ! " he said.

" Paul," she began in a breaking voice, but Paul would not listen. He pointed his arm westwards over the parapet.

" Look ! "

In the neighbourhood of the house all was quiet, though here and there a building was burning near enough to light up their faces from time to time. But away in the south-west a broad red glare canopied the quarter and flames leapt and sank.

" What is it ? " asked Marguerite, distracted from her purpose.

" The Mellah," replied Paul. " They have looted

and burnt it It's the rule and custom. Whatever the cause of an uprising, the Mellah is the first to suffer."

Marguerite had never set foot in that quarter. Paul described it to her—its dirty and crowded alleys, its blue-washed houses jammed together and packed with rich treasures and gaudy worthlessness, gramophones blaring out some comic song of London or Paris, slatternly women and men, ten thousand of them, and then the bursting in of the gates.

" And the Jews themselves ! What has become of them ? " she asked with a shudder.

" God knows ! "

Unarmed, pounded like sheep within their high walls, they were likely to have been butchered like sheep, too.

" There's a small, new gate, however, leading to their cemetery. They may have found that way free," said Paul, without any confidence. But, as a fact, they had escaped whilst their houses were being plundered. The gardens of the Sultan's Palace, which adjoined, had been swiftly thrown open to them, and at this very moment they were camping there without food or money or shelter—except the lucky ones who had made little family groups in the empty cages of Mulai Hafid's menagerie, amongst the lions and the jaguars.

" Paul," Marguerite began a second time—but now a rattle of firing and a distant clamour of fierce cries broke out upon their left hand. Paul Ravenel turned in the direction of the noise over-eagerly, and as Marguerite turned with him, once more her attention

was arrested. From a semicircle of streets a blaze of light, across which thick volumes of smoke drifted, rose above the house-tops, so that the faces of the two watchers were lit up as by a sunset.

" It is the attack upon the Consulates," said Paul. " It will fail. There are troops enough now to hold it."

On the other side of the city, however, to the north, it was a different matter. By the Bab-el-Mahroud the French outpost was hard pressed. Paul was listening with all his intentness.

" It sounds as if our ammunition was running short," he said in a low, grave voice ; and this time Marguerite was not to be denied. Kneeling up, she caught Paul by the arms as he sat, and turned him towards her. The light, strong and bright, was sweeping across his face in waves.

" Paul, is it true ? " she asked, searching his eyes.

Paul Ravenel had no need to ask what was true ; he had no heart to deny its truth. The thing which most he dreaded had come to pass. Marguerite knew what he had done. He had been certain that she knew, from the moment when she had laid her hand upon his head.

" Yes," he answered, meeting her gaze. " It is true."

" You are not on leave ! "

" No."

" You have deserted ! "

Paul's face twitched with a spasm of pain, but he did not take his eyes from Marguerite.

" Yes," he said.

Marguerite shook him gently, as one might shake a wayward child.

" But you can't do that, Paul."

" I have done it, Marguerite."

" Oh, Paul—you can't have understood what you were doing ! You can't have thought ! "

" I have thought of everything."

" You have sacrificed your honour."

" I have you."

" Your career."

" I have you."

" You have lost every friend."

" What do I care about friends, Marguerite, when I have you ? "

She let go of his arms with such an expression of grief and despair upon her face as cut him to the heart to see. She bowed her forehead upon the palms of her hands and burst into tears. Paul drew her close to him, seeking to comfort her.

" We shall be together, Marguerite, always. Yesterday night, when I foretold you of these massacres—you took it lightly because we were together. You seemed to say nothing in the world mattered so long as we were together."

" But don't you see, Paul ? " She drew herself away and raised her face, down which the tears were running. " We have been both of us alone to-night—already. You here on the roof—I in the court below ——And we wanted to be alone ; yes, my dear—why deny it, since I know ? We wanted to be alone, each of us with our miserable thoughts. . . . In a little while, you'll hate me "

"No!" he said violently. "That could never be."

She bent her head over his hands and pressed them to her eyes, wetting them with her tears.

"Paul," she whispered between her sobs, "I can't take such a sacrifice. Oh, my dear, you should have left me with my seven francs and my broken bundle on that balcony in Casablanca."

Paul stooped and kissed her hair.

"Marguerite, I wouldn't have left you there for anything in the world. From the moment I saw you, there was no world for me except the world in which you and I moved step by step and hand in hand."

CHAPTER XVI

Marguerite's Way

Gradually the attack upon the Consulates died away. The waving light from the blaze of torches in the ring of streets about that quarter diminished, and darkness came again to the watchers upon the roof-top. They sat huddled together in silence. Marguerite's broken sobbing had ceased. Above them the bright stars wheeled in a sky of velvet. Only away to the north, where the beleaguered post still held out at the Bab-el-Mahroud, was there now any sound of firing, or any faint clamour of voices. The troubled city rested, waiting for daylight.

Paul became conscious that Marguerite was stirring out of the abandonment of grief in which she had lain. He felt her supple body stiffen in his arms. Some idea, some plan, perhaps, had occurred to her of which he must beware ; all the more beware because she did not speak of it. He was pondering what that plan might be, when above their heads, in their very ears it seemed, the first mueddin on the balcony of his minaret launched over the city his vibrant call to prayer.

The sound startled them both so that they clung together.

" Don't move," whispered Paul.

" The Companions of the Sick ! " said Marguerite in a low voice. " My dear, we shall need them to-night as much as any two in Fez."

They waited for a few moments. Then they crept swiftly and silently to the hatchway and closed it above their heads. In Marguerite's room Paul lighted the candles. Marguerite was wearing the little frock of white and silver in which she had dressed the night before, and she let the dark cloak slip from her shoulders and fall about her feet.

" Paul," she said, joining her hands together upon her breast in appeal, " I want you to do something— for me. You can walk safely through the streets. Dressed as you are, no one will know you. No one will suspect you. If you are spoken to, you can answer. You are Ben Sedira the Maknasi. I want you to go at once to the Protected quarter."

" Why, Marguerite ? "

" You can rejoin your battalion."

" No."

" Oh, you can, Paul ! You can make yourself known. They will let you through their barricades."

" It is too late," said Paul.

Marguerite would not accept the quiet statement.

" No," she pleaded, her eyes eager, her mouth trembling. " I have been thinking it out, my dear, up there on the roof. You can make an excuse. You were seized yesterday night after you had visited the Head-quarters. You were pulled from your horse. You were kept imprisoned, and escaped to-night."

Paul shook his head.

"No one would believe that story, Marguerite. The people of Fez are making no prisoners."

"Then you took refuge in the house of a friend! You have many friends in Fez, Paul. A word from you, and any one of them will back you up and say he gave you shelter. It'll be so easy, Paul, if you'll only listen."

"And meanwhile, Marguerite, what of you?"

She was waiting for that question with her answer ready upon her lips.

"Yes. I have thought of that too, Paul. I shall be quite safe here now by myself. They have searched this house already. They went away satisfied with your story. They will not come here again."

Paul smiled at her tenderly. She stood before him with so eager a flush upon her face, a light so appealing in her eyes. Only this morning—was it so short a time ago as this morning?—yes, only this morning she had been terrified, even with him at her side, because they were shut in within this house without windows, because they could see nothing, know nothing, and must wait and wait with their hearts fluttering at a cry, at the crack of a rifle, at the sound of a step. Now her one thought was to send him forth, to endure alone the dreadful hours of ignorance and expectation, to meet, if needs must, the loneliest of deaths, so that his honour might be saved and his high career retained.

"You are thinking too much of me, Marguerite," he said gently.

Marguerite shook her head.

"I am thinking of myself, my dear, just as much as

I am thinking of you. I am thinking of your love for me. What am I without it ? "

" Nothing will change that," protested Paul.

Marguerite smiled wistfully.

" My dear, how many lovers have used and listened to those words ? Is there one pair that hasn't ? I am looking forward, Paul, to when this trouble is over —to the best that is possible for us two if we are alive when it is over. Your way ! Flight, concealment for the rest of our lives and a bond of disgrace to hold us together, instead of a bond of love which has done no harm to anyone and has given a world of happiness to both of us. Paul, my way is the better way ! Oh, believe it, and leave me ! Paul, I am pleading for myself—I am !—and——" the light went out of her eyes, her head and her body drooped a little ; he had never seen anything so forlorn as Marguerite suddenly looked ; " and oh, ever so much more than you imagine ! " she added wistfully.

Paul took her by the arm which hung listlessly at her side.

" My dear, I can invent no story which would save me. The first shot was fired at noon to-day, not yesterday. Nothing can alter that. And even if it could be altered, I won't leave you to face these horrors alone. I brought you to Fez—don't let us forget that ! I hid you in this house. My place is here with you."

But whilst he was speaking Ravenel had a feeling that he had not reached to the heart of the plan which she had formed upon the roof. The sudden change in her aspect, the quick drop from eager pleading to a forlorn hopelessness, the wistful cry, " I am pleading

for myself ever so much more than you imagine ! "— No, he had not the whole of her intention. There was more in her mind than the effort to persuade him to leave her. There was a provision, a remedy, if persuasion failed.

Paul let her arm go, and drew back a step or two until he leaned against a table of walnut wood set against the wall. Marguerite turned to the dressing-table and stood playing absently with her little ornaments, her brushes and her combs. Then she surprised him by another change of mood. The eager, tender appeal, the sudden hopelessness were followed now by a tripping flippancy.

" Fancy your caring so much for me, Paul ! " she cried, and she tittered like a schoolgirl. " A little dancing thing from the Villa Iris ! I am not worth it. Am I, Paul ? "

She turned to him, soliciting " yes " for an answer ; smiling with her lips, though she could not with her eyes, and keeping these latter lowered so that he should not see them. " Well, since your silence tells me so politely that I am, I'll give up trying to persuade you to leave me." She yawned. " I am tired to death, Paul. I shall sleep to-night. And you ? "

She cocked her head on one side with a coquettish gaiety, false to her at any time, and never so false to her as now. To Paul, whose memory had warned him for the second time that day, it was dreadful to see.

" I shall watch by the court below," he said, and he moved a step or two away from the little table against the wall.

" Then go, or I shall fall asleep where I stand," said Marguerite, and she led him to the wide doors opening on to the landing. " I shall leave the doors open, so that you will be within call."

She gave him a little push, which was more of a caress than a push, and suddenly caught him back to her. Her eyes were raised now, her arms were about his neck.

" Paul," she whispered, and both eyes and lips were smiling gravely, " whatever happens to me, my dear, I shall owe you some wonderful months of happiness. Months which I had dreamed of, and which proved more wonderful than any dreams. Thank you, dear one ! Thank you a thousand times ! "

She kissed him upon the lips and laid her hand upon his cheek, and stood apart from him.

" Good night, Paul."

Paul Ravenel answered her with a curious smile.

" You might be saying good-bye to me, Marguerite."

Marguerite shook her head with determination.

" I shall never say good-bye to you, Paul, not even if this very second we were to hear the assassins surging up the stairs," she said, her eyes glowing softly into his, and a sure faith making her face very beautiful. " We have broken codes and laws, my dear, both of us. But we have both touched, I think, in spite of that, something bigger and finer than we had either of us believed was here to touch. And I don't believe that—you and I——" she made a little gesture with her hand between herself and him—" the miracle, as you called it, of you and me, can end just snapped off and incomplete. Why, my dear, even if we go right back to

earth, at the very worst, I believe," she said with a smile of humour, " some spark of you will kindle some dry tinder of me and make a flame to warm a luckier pair of lovers."

Paul looked at her in silence.

" You talk to me like that ! " he said at length. " And then you try to persuade me you weren't worth while." He turned the moment of emotion with a laugh. " Good night, Marguerite," and he went downstairs.

Marguerite waited without moving whilst he descended the stairs and crossed the court. She heard him pass into the room with the archway and the clocks. He was quite invisible to her now. Therefore, so was she to him ; and she was standing very close to the doors, just within her bedroom—no more. She stepped back silently. There were rugs upon the floor, and between the rugs she stepped most carefully lest one of the heels of her satin shoes should click upon the boards. She went straight to the little table of walnut wood set against the wall, and laid her hand upon the drawer. The handle was of brass, she lifted it so that it should not rattle, and so stood with an ear towards the stairway, listening. But no sound came from the court, there was not a creak of any tread on the stairs. Reassured, Marguerite pulled open the drawer a little way. The table had been fashioned in a century when tables really were made. The drawer slid out smoothly and noiselessly just far enough for Marguerite's hand to slip through the opening.

Her fingers, however, touched nothing. She opened the drawer wider. It was empty. Yet it had not

been empty that evening when she had changed her clothes.

"Paul was standing here," she said to herself. "Yes, facing me with his back to the table, whilst I was talking to him."

She remembered now that when she had thrown her arms about his neck, as he stood in the doorway, he had kept his left hand behind his back. She sat down upon the edge of the bed, and a smile flitted across her face.

"I might have known that he would have understood," she whispered. He always had understood, from the first moment when, without a word, he had called her to him at the Villa Iris. But Marguerite must make sure. She stole out on to the landing. From the point where she stood she could look down and across the court, into the room with the clocks. Paul was lying upon the cushions in a muse, looking at something which lay darkly gleaming on the outstretched palm of his hand—her little automatic pistol. He had cleaned it and reloaded it and replaced it in the drawer that afternoon, after Marguerite had fainted and it had exploded on the floor. He had taken it out of the drawer when Marguerite was bidding him good-bye a few minutes back. For, mingled with her words, another and a coarser voice had been whispering in his ears, "And if it comes—the grand passion! She will blow her brains out—the little fool!"

Not from disillusionment, as Henriette with her bitter experience of life expected, but to save him, Paul Ravenel, to set him free, whilst there was still

perhaps a chance that by some deft lie he might hold on to his career and his good name. "That, no!" said Paul, and he pushed the pistol into his waistbelt and composed himself for his long vigil.

The candles burned down, and one by one flickered out; mueddin succeeded mueddin in the minaret; but for their voices the town was quiet; Paul Ravenel, tired with the anxiety, the sleeplessness and the inward conflicts which through thirty hours had been his share, nodded, dozed, and in the end slept. He woke to find the grey of the morning thinning the shadows in the house, making it chill and eerie and an abode of ghosts. Surely a ghost was stirring in the house with a little flutter and hiss of unsubstantial raiment, a ripple of silver and fire—there by the balustrade above the patio, now on the stairs. . . . And now Paul Ravenel, though he did not move, was wide awake, watching from his dark corner with startled eyes. Marguerite was on the stairs, now stopping to peer over towards her lover, lest he should have moved, now most stealthily descending.

The last mueddin had ceased his chant; a hum of voices rose through the still air without the house; the city was waking to another day of massacre. And Marguerite was creeping down the stairs. She had not gone to bed that night, after all. She was still wearing her white frock with the embroidery of silver. She had thrown over her shoulders a glistening cloak. She had put on the jewels he had given her. They sparkled in the dim light on her bosom—a square sapphire hung on a chain of platinum and diamonds

which went about her neck—on her wrists, on her shoes, at her waist.

"Why? Why?" he asked of himself; and as Marguerite reached the foot of the stairs and stepped into the court, he had the answer to his question. For something gleamed in her hand—the great key of the street door.

Paul Ravenel was just in time. For, with the swiftness and the silence of the ghost he had almost taken her to be, Marguerite flashed across the patio, and was gone.

"Marguerite!" he cried aloud as he sprang to his feet, so that the house rang with his cry. A sob, a wail of despair answered him, a clink as the heavy key dropped from her startled hands. He found her blindly fumbling at the bolts, distraught with her need of haste.

"Paul, let me go! Let me go!" she cried.

He lifted her in his arms as one lifts a child, and carried her back into the court.

"Marguerite!" he whispered," a step outside that tunnel, dressed as you are, now that Fez is awake, and——"

"I know, I know," she interrupted him. "I should be out of your way altogether. Oh, Paul, let me go! I have been thinking of it all night! I can't take, all the time, and everything you have that's dear to you! Let me give, too—something in return —my life, my dear, that's worth so little. Oh, Paul, let me give it now, when I am ready to give it—before my courage goes," and she struggled and beat upon his breast with her small fists in a frenzy.

But he held her close to him. "Poor child, what a night of horror she must have lived through!" he reflected. Lying on her bed in the dark, waiting for the first gleam of dawn, for the first sounds of the city's awakening, and shutting her eyes and her ears against the terror of these savage and wild-eyed fanatics, forbidding her heart to sink before the ordeal of her great sacrifice. She had decked herself out in her jewels, like that bride of whom she had told him, but for a different reason—that she might the sooner attract notice and invite murder.

"It was mad, Marguerite!" he cried, and then, holding her to his heart, "but it was splendid!"

Already her strength was waning. She no longer struggled. She hung in his arms. Her hands stroked his face.

"Let me go, Paul," she pleaded, "won't you? It will be quick. The first of them who sees me! Oh, while I can do it. My dear, my dear, I'll gladly die for you, I love you so."

"Quick?" exclaimed Paul Ravenel savagely. "You don't know them! I have seen our men on the battle-fields. Quick? My dear, they would bind you hand and foot and give you to their women to mutilate alive."

Marguerite uttered a cry and struggled against him no more. He carried her up the stairs, undressed her and put her to bed. She laid her hand in his. He would have his way. She gave herself into his keeping, and, holding fast on to his hand, she fell asleep.

That morning the roar of the guns was louder, and the shells were flying over the city.

CHAPTER XVII

The Outcasts

That day, the eighteenth of April, broke in gloom. A heavy canopy of sullen clouds hung over Fez. Nowhere within eye's reach was there a slant of sunshine. There were no shadows, no flashes of colour. White houses and dark gardens, and green-tiled mosques, all lay very clear and near and distinct, but without any of the radiance which on a day of sunlight gives to the city so magical a beauty that a stranger looking down upon it can believe that he has wandered into fairyland.

The shells were screaming over Fez from the south. They dispersed the Moors holding the North Fort outside the walls, and they destroyed the castle of Sidi Bou Nafa, in Fez Jdedid, close to the Sultan's Palace, which was held in force by the insurgents. But there were too many refugees still hiding, and too many Fazi secretly friendly to the French, to make possible such a bombardment as would reduce the city to terms.

The insurgents were still in possession of every quarter of the town, except the Sultan's Palace and the district of the Embassy and Consulates. The little post at the Bab-el-Mahroud had been exterminated during the night. The company of which that post

had been a section under Captain Henry, subsequently to be famous as a General upon a wider field, was fighting its way desperately back in the Souk Senadjine. Another company sent to join hands with him and occupy the quarter of Tala, was held up in the Souk-Ben-Safi ; and the post at the southern gate of Bab Fetouh was in desperate straits. The only gleam that morning was the rescue of the guests besieged in the Hotel de France under the covering fire of a platoon stationed on the roof of the British Consulate. The screams of the women, indeed, shrilled from the roof-tops with a fiercer exultation than even on the outbreak of the rising.

Marguerite woke later to the sound of them. She held her hands over her ears and called loudly to Paul :

" I want to look at your arm," she said when he ran to her.

" It's going on finely. It can wait until you are dressed."

" No."

She slipped her legs out of bed and sat on the edge of it, thrusting her feet into her slippers. She wanted to do something at once which would take her thoughts from that piercing and inhuman din. Paul brought to her the medicine chest, and she dressed and bandaged the half-healed wound.

" Thank you, Marguerite. I'll tell them to get your bath ready," he said as he turned to go. But the screaming overhead made her blood run cold. She could endure the roar of the seventy-fives, the rattle of musketry, even the wild yelling of the men, but

this cruel frenzy of the gaily-dressed women upon the housetops, never tiring whilst daylight lasted, shocked her as something obscene—the screaming of offal-birds, not women, a thing not so much unnatural as an accusation against nature and the God that made nature. She quickly called her lover back.

"Paul, you took my little pistol from the drawer of my table there last night."

"Well?" said Paul, looking at her in doubt.

"I want you to give it back to me."

Paul Ravenel hesitated.

"You need not fear," she continued. "Yesterday I meant to use it—for your dear sake, as I thought—or rather for both our sakes. But since you will keep me with you—why, all that's over, and I shall not use it unless there is real need. Listen!" She lifted her hand and, as she listened, shuddered. "You spoke of those women this morning. What they would do to me. I should feel—safe if you would give my pistol back to me."

Paul took it from his belt and laid it on the flat of her hand.

"Thank you," she said with a sigh of relief. She sat on the edge of the bed, her hair tumbled about her shoulders, smiling at this little weapon which could make death swift and easy, like a child delighted with a new toy.

Things which make the flesh crawl and the spirit shudder have sometimes a curious and dreadful fascination. All through their luncheon these strident cries called to Marguerite, drew her like some morbid vice. She wanted to creep up on to the roof, to crouch

behind the parapet, though she knew that her heart would miss its beats and her senses reel on the edge of terror. And when Paul Ravenel said, "Marguerite, I shall lie down on my bed and sleep when we have finished," she realised that it was her own wish which he was uttering. She was almost disappointed when he lit a cigar. A cigarette, yes. But a cigar! That needs a deal of smoking.

"You'll wake me if there's need," said Paul. "I think that I shall sleep soundly."

Marguerite noticed the heaviness of his eyelids, and was filled with compunction.

"If I must," she answered, determining that, whatever happened, he who had hardly slept at all for fifty hours, should sleep his sleep out now.

Yet within an hour she had waked him.

Hardly, indeed, had Paul's eyes closed before she climbed to the roof. The terraces of the houses were a very kaleidoscope of shifting colours. Orange, scarlet, deep waistbelts of cloth of gold over dresses of purple, and blue and pink were grouped in clusters here like flower-beds. There the women moved in and out with frantic gestures like revellers in Bedlam. And over all the shrill, vibrant pæan like a canopy!

Marguerite watched and listened, shivering—until one house caught and riveted her eyes. At the back of her house flowed the Karouein river. The farther bank was lined with the walls of houses, and about one, a little to Marguerite's right, there was suddenly a great commotion. Marguerite lifted her head cautiously above the parapet and looked down. A narrow path ran between the houses and the stream,

and this path was suddenly crowded with men as though they had sprung from the earth. They beat upon the door; they fired senselessly at the blind mud walls with rifles; they shouted for admittance. And the roof of that one house was empty. Marguerite was suddenly aware of it. It was the only empty roof in all that row of houses.

The shouts from the path were redoubled. Orders to open became screams of exultation, threats of vengeance. Marguerite, looking down from her high vantage point, saw the men upon the pathway busy like ants. A group of them clustered suddenly. They seemed to stoop, to lengthen themselves into a line, to lift—and now she saw what they were lifting. A huge square, long beam of wood—a battering ram? Yes, a battering ram. Three times the beam was swung against the door to the tune of some monotonous rhythm of the East, which breathed of deserts and strange temples and abiding wistfulness, curiously out of keeping with the grim violence which was used. At the fourth blow the door burst and broke. It was as though a river dam had broken and a river torrent leapt in a solid shaft through the breach.

For a few moments thereafter nothing was seen by Marguerite. The walls of the house were a curtain between her and the tragic stage. She could only imagine the overturning of furniture, the pillage of rooms a moment since clean and orderly, now a dirty wreckage, a pandemonium of a search—and then the empty roof was no longer empty. A man sprang out upon it, a man wearing the uniform of a French officer. He had been bolted like a rat by dogs.

Clearly his enemies were upon his heels. Marguerite saw him spring over the parapet on to the adjoining roof, and a cloud of women assail him. Somehow he threw them off, somehow he dived and dodged between them, somehow he reached the farther parapet, found a ladder propped against the outside wall and slid down it on to a third housetop. And as he reached the flat terrace yet another swarm of screaming termagants enveloped him. He was borne down to the floor of the roof. For a little while there was a wild tossing of arms, a confusion of bodies. It seemed to Marguerite as though all these women had suddenly melted into one fabulous monster. Then, with shrieks of joy and flutterings of scarves and handkerchiefs, they stood apart, dancing flatly on their feet. The officer, for his part, lay inert, and for the best of reasons—he was bound hand and foot. . . . And shortly afterwards the women lighted a fire. . . . .

"A fire?" said Marguerite in a perplexity. "Why a fire?"

She watched, and then she heard the dreadful loud moan of a man in the extremity of pain. In a moment she was shaking Paul Ravenel by the shoulder, her face white and quivering, her eyes still looking out in horror upon a world incredible.

"Paul! Paul! Wake up!"

Ravenel came slowly out of a deep sleep, with a thought that once more the insurgents were about his door. But a few stammering words from Marguerite brought him quickly to his feet. He unlocked a cupboard and took from it a carbine in a canvas case.

He slipped off the case and fitted a charged magazine beneath the breech.

" You will wait here, Marguerite."

Whilst he was speaking he was already on the stair. Marguerite could not wait below as he had bidden her. This horror must end. She must know, of her own knowledge, that it had ended. She followed Paul as far as the mouth of the trap, and came to a stop there, her feet upon the stairs, her head just above the level of the roof. The groans of the tortured man floated across the open space, mingled with the triumphant screams of the women.

" Oh, hurry, Paul, hurry ! " she cried, and she heard him swear horribly.

The oath meant less than nothing to her. Would he never fire ? He was kneeling behind the parapet, crouching a little so that not a flutter of his haik should be visible, with the barrel of his carbine resting upon the bricks. Why didn't he fire ? She stamped upon the stairs in a frenzy of impatience. She could not see that the women were perpetually shifting and crossing about their victim and obscuring him from Paul Ravenel.

At last a moment came when the line of sight was clear ; and immediately the carbine spoke—once and no more ; and all about her in this upper city of the air all noises ceased, groans, exultations, everything. It was to Marguerite as though the crack of that carbine had suspended all creation. In a few seconds the shrill screams broke out again, but there could be no doubt about their character. They were screams of terror. These, in their turn, dwindled and ceased.

Had Marguerite raised her head above the parapet now, she would have seen that those terraces, so lately thronged, were empty except one, on which a fire was burning, and where one man in a uniform lay quite still and at peace with a bullet through his heart.

But Marguerite was watching Paul, who had sunk down below the edge of the parapet and was gazing upwards with startled eyes. Marguerite crept to his side.

"What is it?" she whispered.

Paul pointed. Just above their heads a tiny wisp of smoke coiled and writhed in the air like an adder.

"If that were seen——" said Paul in a low voice.

"Yes."

If that tiny wisp from the smokeless powder of his cartridge were seen floating in the air, there would be no doubt from what roof the shot had been fired. Paul drew Marguerite down beside him; together they watched. There was no wind at all; the air was sluggish and heavy; it seemed to them that the smoke was going slowly to curl and weave above their heads for ever. It grew diaphanous, parted into fine shreds, tumbled, and at last was gone.

The two lovers looked at one another with a faint smile upon their lips. But they did not move; they crouched down, seeing nothing but the empty sky above their heads.

The danger was not past. At any moment the sound of blows upon their door might resound again through the house. Or they might hear a ladder grate softly on the outside of this parapet, as it was raised from one of the roofs below. They waited there

for half an hour. Then a shell screamed above their heads and exploded. It was followed by another and another.

"They are shelling the Souk-Ben-Safi," said Paul. "Look! You can see the twinkle of the guns." He pointed out to her the flashes on the hills to the east of the town. "That's the way! Let the guns talk to these torturers!" He shook his fist over the town, standing upright now upon the roof, his face aflame with anger.

"Paul! Paul!" Marguerite cried in warning.

"There's no one to see," he returned with a savage laugh. "One shell in the Souk-Ben-Safi, and they're shivering in their cellars. Come, let us go down!"

For an hour the shells hammered and screeched above the roof, and Paul, as he cleaned his carbine, whistled joyously. He raised his head from his task, to see Marguerite, very white in the face, clinging to her chair with clenched hands, and trying in vain to whistle too.

"I am a brute," he cried in compunction. "They won't touch this house, Marguerite! It's too near the Karouein Mosque. The French are going to stay in Morocco. They'll not touch the Karouein Mosque. There's no spot in Fez safer from our guns."

Marguerite professed herself reassured, but it did occur to her that gunners and even guns might make occasionally a mistake, and she drew a very long breath of relief when the bombardment ceased.

Paul Ravenel, however, fell into a restless mood, pacing the court, and now and again coming to a stop in front of Marguerite with some word upon his lips,

which after all he did not speak. Marguerite guessed it, and after a little struggle made herself his interpreter.

"The bombardment's over. It will keep Fez quiet for awhile. Even if that wisp of smoke was seen, no crowd will come here for an explanation—yet, at all events. Why don't you go outside into the town and get the news?"

The eager light in his eyes told her clearly that she had interpreted him aright. But Paul, not knowing the reason which had prompted her, sought for another. He looked at Marguerite wearily.

"I gave you back your pistol," he said.

"And I promised not to use it," she replied.

Paul shifted from one foot to the other, anxious for news, eager, after his two days' confinement in this shell, for action, yet remorseful for his eagerness.

"It wouldn't be fair," he said half-heartedly.

"But I want you to go," she answered, with a glimmer of a smile at this man turned shame-faced schoolboy who stood in front of her. "You're wild to go, really, Paul, and I am in no danger." She drew a swift breath as she said that, and hoped that he would not notice it.

Paul Ravenel did not.

"Yes, I am relentless, Marguerite," he said in a burst. "I'll tell you why. Do you know what I did on the roof? What I had to do?"

"You frightened the women away—shot one of them—put an end to their fiendishness."

Paul shook his head.

"That would have been no use, my dear. The man, a brother officer of mine, would still have lain

upon that roof in torture and helpless. They would have left him there till dark and finished their work then, if he were still alive. Can you guess what they were doing? They were burning his head slowly."

"Oh!"

Marguerite had a vision of herself rushing out into the street, as only that morning she had proposed to do, and meeting the same fate. She covered her eyes with her hands.

"I am sorry, dear. I had to tell you, because I have to tell you this too. I killed him."

Marguerite took her hands from her face and stared at her lover.

"I had to," said Paul in a dull voice. "There was no other way to save him. But of course it"—and he sat down suddenly with his hands clenched together and his head bowed—"it troubles me dreadfully. Who he was I don't know—his face was blackened with the fire—but he may have served with me in the Chaiovia—he may have marched up with me to Fez—we may have sat together on many nights over a camp fire, telling each other how clever we were—and I had to kill him, just as one puts a horse out of its misery."

"Oh, my dear," said Marguerite. She was at his side with her arm about his shoulders—comforting him. "I didn't understand. You could do nothing else. And you were quick. He would be the first to thank you."

Paul took the hand that was laid upon his shoulder gratefully.

"No, I could do nothing else," he said. "But I want to move, so that I mayn't think of it."

"I know," she said.

She made light of her own isolation in that house. Paul, it was plain to her, was in a dangerous mood. Horror at the thing which he had been forced to do, anger at the stroke of fate which had set him to the tragic choice between his passion and his duty, bitterness against the men in power who had refused to listen, were seething within him. He was in a mood to run riot in a Berserk rage at a chance word, a chance touch, to kill and kill and kill, until he in turn was borne down and stamped to death. But Marguerite stood aside. One appeal—it would be enough if only her eyes looked it—and without a doubt he would stay. Yes, stay and remember that he had been stayed! She did not even bid him take care or hurry back to her. She called Selim and bade him stand by the outer door.

Paul took a great staff in his hand and came back to Marguerite and kissed her on the lips.

"Thank you," he said. "How you know!"

"I pay my little price, Paul, for a very big love." And, as was her way, she turned off the moment of emotion with a light word and a laugh. "There! Run along, and mind you don't get your feet wet!"

For three hours thereafter she sat alone in the court, with her pistol in her hand, paying her little price. Outside, the noise of a town in tumult; inside, the ticking of a clock. And darkness came.

* * * * *

Marguerite had her reward. Paul Ravenel returned at eight o'clock, his robes covered with dust and mud,

his body tired, but his black mood gone. He dressed himself after his bath in the grey suit of a European, and as they sat at dinner he gave Marguerite his good news. The back of the rebellion was broken. The tribes which were gathering in the south and east of the town had been dispersed by the artillery.

" Moinier and his column will be here before they can gather again. They were the great danger, Marguerite, for if they had once got into Fez they would have looted it from end to end. Friend's house or enemy's house, Fasi or Christian, would have been all the same to these gentlemen."

The rising was premature. That had been the cause of its failure. The quarter of the Consulates and the Embassy had not been carried by storm on the first day. The number of the Askris who had joined the insurgents under fear were now returning to their duties. The great dignitaries of the Maghzen were in a hurry to protest their loyalty by returning the few wounded prisoners and such dead bodies of French soldiers as they could collect to the head-quarters at the hospital.

" There's still a post very hard pressed at the Bab Fetouh. An effort was made to relieve it this afternoon——" Paul Ravenel broke off abruptly with a sudden smile upon his face and a light of enjoyment in his eyes. " I expect that they will try now from Dar-Debigagh outside the walls. It should be easier that way," he said hurriedly.

Something had happened that afternoon of which he had not told Marguerite, and to which he owed his high spirits. Marguerite was well aware of it. She

had not a doubt that he was hiding from her some rash act of which he was at once rather ashamed and very glad ; and it amused her to note how clever he thought himself in concealing it from her. What had happened in that attempt to relieve the post at the Bab Fetouh ? Marguerite did not ask, having a fine gift of silence. She had Paul back safe and sound, and the worst of their dangers was over. They were gay once more that night, looking upon it as a sort of sanctuary between the dangers of the past two days and the troubles which awaited them in the future.

" Shall we go up on to the roof ? " Marguerite asked, looking at the clock.

" We will go half-way up to the roof," replied Paul, and Marguerite laughed as he put out the candles.

* * * * *

But the next day the rebellion was over. A battalion from Meknes, with a section of mitrailleuses, marched in at three o'clock in the afternoon, having covered the sixty-five kilometres in a single stage. An order was given that every house which wished to avoid bombardment must fly the tricolour flag on the following morning, and Fez was garnished as for a festival. Never was there so swift a change. On every housetop daybreak saw the flag of France, and though the women thronged the terraces as yesterday, they were as silent as the bricks of their parapets. By a curious chance the pall of sullen rain-charged clouds, which for four days had hung low, was on this morning rolled away and the city shimmered to the sun.

Paul and Marguerite watched the strange spectacle,

hidden behind their roof wall ; and their thoughts were busy with the same question.

" What of us now—the outcasts ? "

Paul looked across the city to Fez Djedid and the east. From that quarter General Moinier's column was advancing. One day—two days perhaps—three days at the most, and it would be here at the Bab Segma. There was little time !

He turned, to find Marguerite's eyes swimming in tears.

" Paul, can nothing be done to give you back your own place ? "

" Nothing, Marguerite. Let us face it frankly ! I went to Head-quarters and warned them. Therefore I knew the danger. All the more, therefore, my place that night was with my company. Nothing can get over that."

Marguerite with a sob buried her face in her hands.

" What I have cost you, Paul ! "

" What you have given me, Marguerite ! " he replied, and fell into a silence. When he spoke to her again, he spoke with his eyes averted from her face lest she should read more than he meant her to in his.

" Of course, Marguerite, you have done no wrong. . . . We have got to consider that, my dear. There isn't really any reason why you should pay too. You wanted to take the risk. . . ."

" The certainty, Paul, as it turned out. I should not be in the sunshine on this roof now, if you had listened to me," she interrupted ; but Paul was not to be led aside.

" What I mean is that you are not responsible. I

am, I alone. Therefore there's no reason why you should cut yourself off from all the things which make life lovely," he continued. "For it means that, my dear. All the things which make life lovely will go."

"Except one," said Marguerite quietly, "and that one easily outweighs all the rest."

Still Paul would not turn to her.

"Think well, Marguerite!" and he spoke without striving, in a level, toneless voice, so that no spark of his desire might kindle her to a sacrifice which after-days, monotonous and lonely, would lead her bitterly to regret. "Think carefully! You can travel in a little while to the coast. You can go home. No one can gainsay you. You will not be poor any more. In a few years you will be able to look back upon all this as a dream. . . ."

"Don't, Paul!" she said in a low voice. "You hurt me. You make me ashamed. How could I go home and live, leaving you here?"

But what hurt and shamed her most, she could not tell him. It was the knowledge that this hero of hers, this—her man who could do no wrong, had done such wrong for her that he was now an outcast who must dodge and duck his head, and slink unrecognised in the shadows. Her pain, however, was evident enough in the quiver of her voice and the tight clasp of her hand upon his arm.

"Look at me, Paul!"

She waited until he had turned and her great eyes, dewy and tender, rested upon his.

"Where you go, I go. That was settled for us at

the Villa Iris on the night we met, perhaps even before that."

Paul argued no more. He was kneeling in front of her upon a cushion. He took her two hands and, lifting them, he bowed his head and pressed the palms against his face.

"Then let us go down and make our plans," he said. "For what we do, we must do very quickly."

His urgency startled her.

"But this house is not known. We are safe here!"

Paul glanced again towards the east. He had the look of the hunted.

"There's a man drawing nearer to us every minute, who will rake through Fez with a tooth-comb to find out what has become of me," he said.

"An enemy?" Marguerite asked in dismay.

"No, my friend, Gerard de Montignac. He is on Moinier's staff."

"But he will remain your friend," cried Marguerite. "even if he——"

Paul Ravenel completed the sentence for her.

"Discovers that I deserted. Not he! Perhaps, just because he was my friend, he would be harder than any other."

Underneath the good-fellowship, the fun, the delight in the gaieties and ornaments of life, Gerard de Montignac had all the hard, practical logic of the French character. Certain things are not permissible. For those who do them there is a law, and that is the end of the matter. And at the very head of the things

that are not permissible is the tampering with the military oath.

"Friendship will lead Gerard to search for me in every corner," said Paul. That was the danger. For if Gerard stumbled upon the truth in his search, the friend would turn straightway into the hunter.

Paul followed Marguerite down the stairs, and they talked earnestly for a long while. Then Paul arranged his haik about his turban, slipped his djellaba of wool over his linen caftan, and going out, was very busy in Fez all that day.

CHAPTER XVIII

Captain Laguessiere's Report

On the 21st of April, two days later, Gerard de Montignac rode into Fez at ten o'clock of the morning, behind General Moinier. He was lodged at the Auvert Hospital, and as he came out of his room he passed in the corridor a face which he remembered. He turned on the instant.

"Baumann!"

Baumann was that short, stockish Alsatian, belonging to the Department of Native Affairs, whom Gerard many months before had sought at the Villa Iris. He shook Gerard's hand with deferential warmth.

"Captain de Montignac! How can I serve you?"

The sight of Gerard always made Baumann think of the Bois de Boulogne and brought to his nostrils a smell of Paris. "Stylish" was Baumann's epithet for this slim, razor-like being.

"You can tell me for a second time how it goes with my *grand serieux* and where he is to be found."

Baumann was enchanted by the familiar allusion. It made him out as intimate of Captain de Montignac. But he was baffled too.

"The name would help," he said, hesitating.

"Oh, Paul Ravenel, of course!" replied Gerard

impatiently, and Baumann's face lengthened. He fidgeted uncomfortably on his feet. Yes, Paul Ravenel to be sure! Captain de Montignac had been uneasy about Paul Ravenel in Casablanca, when there was really no occasion for uneasiness. This time, however, the case was very different.

"Alas, my Captain, I can give you no news of your friend at all! Many officers were caught at a disadvantage. We are afraid—yes, we are all very much afraid."

Gerard, with his legs apart and his hands thrust into the pockets of his riding-breeches, looked at his twittering companion for a moment. Then he said abruptly:

"Let me hear!"

Baumann had an uncomfortable little story to tell. Late on the night of the 16th, the night before the massacres openly began, Captain Ravenel had ridden up to the door of the hospital with a native servant carrying a lantern in front of him. He was labouring under a great anxiety and distress. Baumann himself received Captain Ravenel and heard his story. Captain Ravenel had assured him that the Askris would revolt immediately, and that there would be a massacre of the white people throughout the city.

"And you didn't believe Paul Ravenel?" thundered Gerard de Montignac.

Baumann was in a haste to exculpate himself.

"I waked up the two Intelligence Officers, Colonel Renaud and Captain Brouarre," he said. "They came down in their pyjamas. We went into the room on the right of the entrance here, and the Captain told

us all again many bad things which have since been fulfilled."

"And you wouldn't believe Paul Ravenel!" Gerard looked at Baumann with a bitter amazement. "He gave you the warning, he the wise one, and you thought he was exaggerating like some panic-stricken rich Fasi."

"We hoped he was exaggerating," said the unhappy Baumann. "You see our hands were tied. Reports that disturbances were likely had gone to the Embassy before, and had been not very civilly received. It was an order that no similar reports should be presented. It was late at night. We could do nothing."

Gerard could read into the halting sentences all that Baumann was not the man to say.

"Well?" he asked curtly. "What of Paul?"

Paul, very disappointed, had mounted his horse again and ridden off to the Bab Segma on his way to the camp at Dar-Debibagh.

"But he never reached the camp. He has not been seen since. We are all very much afraid."

It was quite clear that Baumann had no hope at all that Paul Ravenel would ever be seen again.

"Most of our people scattered through Fez have been accounted for," he added. "Many were rescued and brought here to safety. The bodies of others, too, but not of all. There has been no means of making inquiries."

"That, of course, I understand," said Gerard de Montignac as he turned sorrowfully away.

Gerard was a Monarchist. Some day the French

would have a king again, when there was a claimant worth his salt. Meanwhile he was heart and soul for France, whatever its régime. So his first grief now was for the loss to France of the great soldier that was surely to be—nay, that was already beginning to be. He had lost a good comrade and friend too. These losses must be paid for—as soon as there was leisure to exact payment—and paid for in full.

Meanwhile he went about his work. On the 22nd the troops occupied the city. The two following days were taken up in the disarmament of the population. Yet other two days were given to pleadings and arguments and exhortations to Paris and the civil authorities for permission to declare a state of siege. Only when this permission was reluctantly granted and the order made, could any of the General's staff unbutton their tunics and give a little time to their own affairs.

Gerard's first move was to ride out to the camp at Dar-Debibagh, whither Paul's battalion of Tirailleurs had now returned. There he found the little Praslin now in command of Paul's company, and the little Praslin had information of importance to give to him.

"Captain Ravenel rode back with me to the camp from the Sultan's Palace on the evening of the 16th, after the great storm," said Praslin. "He was very glad that the storm had delayed for three days the departure of the Mission."

"He knew already, then, that afternoon, that the massacres were coming!" said Gerard.

"No! I should say not. He was quite frank about

the whole position of affairs here, as he saw it. If he had imagined that Fez itself was going to rise he would have said so, I am sure. What he did believe was that a serious attack would be made upon the Mission out in the bled, on its way to the coast."

"He was afraid that the escort was not strong enough?"

"He certainly thought that," replied Praslin slowly and in a voice which suggested that he did not consider this explanation at all adequate to explain Paul's satisfaction at the postponement of the march. "But fear doesn't enter into the matter at all. There was something more. I got the impression that he just hated the idea of going down to the coast, if only for a few weeks. He wanted to stay on here in Fez. An attack on the line of march! That he would have considered as in the day's work. No! He didn't want to leave Fez. Curious! Wasn't it?"

Gerard glanced sharply at Lieutenant Praslin.

"Oho!" he exclaimed softly. "Curious? Yes! But then Paul Ravenal was never like the rest of us."

He remained silent for a little while, turning some quite new thought over and over uneasily in his mind.

"Well?" he said, waking up again.

"After we had returned here, he changed into a dry uniform, for we were both wet through, and told me that he was going to dine with a friend in Fez," Praslin resumed. "I reminded him that there was a battalion parade at six the next morning."

"Yes?"

" He answered that he had not forgotten, and rode off."

" And that was the last you heard of him ? " asked Gerard de Montignac.

" No ! "

" Oh ? "

" It was the last I saw of him," Praslin corrected.

" What do you mean ? " asked Gerard de Montignac.

" Five minutes after Captain Ravenel had gone, a native came to the camp and asked for him. He carried a letter."

Gerard's face lit up.

" A letter ? What became of it ? "

" It was taken by Captain Ravenel's orderly and placed on the table in his tent."

" Yes ? "

" The next morning I saw it there, and took charge of it. It was addressed in Arabic."

" You have got it still ? "

" Yes ! "

" Let me see it ! "

Gerard reminded the little Praslin of some lean, sharp-nosed pointer which somewhere in the stubble has picked up a scent. Praslin led him to his tent, unlocked a leather satchel and tipped out a number of letters on to his bed.

" Here it is ! "

He handed a paper, not an envelope, folded and sealed and superscribed in Arabic characters, to Gerard. Gerard almost snatched at it. But once he had it in his hands, he was no longer so sure. He twiddled it

between his fingers, and gingerly. He sat down in Praslin's camp chair and looked at Praslin, and looked at the letter. He seemed to be afraid of what he might read in it. Finally, in a burst, he cried :

" I shall open it."

" But of course," said the little Praslin.

Gerard broke the seal and read. Praslin wondered what he had dreaded to find written upon that paper, so evident was his relief now. It was the letter from Si el Hadj Arrifa which had just missed Paul Ravenel on the night of the 16th. It began with the usual flowery protestations and ended with an apologetic request that Paul should not come into Fez that night.

" This makes everything easier," said Gerard, springing up from his chair. " I shall keep this letter, Praslin."

He returned with it in his pocket, and at once made inquiries as to what was known of Si el Hadj Arrifa. The warning on the face of it was a sign of good will to France. Yes, but some of these Fasi were very foxy people. This letter arriving at the camp just too late to save Paul Ravenel's life, but in heaps of time to establish Si el Hadj Arrifa's good name for loyalty, might easily have been dispatched with those two objects. It was all quite in keeping with the sly, furtive character of the men of Fez. However, Gerard was soon satisfied on that point. Si el Hadj Arrifa was of the real friends. Gerard accordingly knocked upon his door that very night.

He was received with much ceremony and a great warmth of welcome ; not to be wondered at, since the

Moor had been sitting cowering behind his stoutly-barred door ever since the night of the 16th. Gerard made haste to put the timid man at his ease.

"All the weapons have been collected. All the gates are held by armed posts. A state of siege is proclaimed so that violence can be dealt with sternly and at once," he said. But even then he must not put the questions burning on his tongue. France was to remain in Morocco. Very well! Then even in small things must the ways of the country be respected Gerard had the patience which is the kernel and centre of good manners. He sat through the five brewings of green tea, ceremoniously conversing. Only then did he come to the reason of his visit.

"It has been my good fortune, O Si el Hadj Arrifa, to bring you excellent news to-night. Would that I could hear news as excellent from you! My friend and your friend, Captain Ravenel, dined with you one night and rode away from your door, and that night he disappeared."

Si el Hadj Arrifa struck a bell which stood by his side and spoke a word to the negress who answered it. He turned again to Gerard.

"I have sent for my servant Mohammed, who carried the lantern in front of his Excellency's horse. He shall tell you the story with his own lips."

Mohammed duly appeared and told the truth—with omissions; how the Captain had fallen behind in the tunnel, how the startled horse had dashed past him, how he had returned and found no sign of the Captain at all, how two men had appeared, and he had fled in

a panic. But there was no mention of any small door in the angle of the wall.

"We will look at that tunnel by daylight," said Gerard when the man had finished, "if, O Si el Hadj Arrifa, you will lend me your servant."

He spoke dispiritedly. There seemed very little chance that he would find any trace of his *grand serieux*. He had been, and he was not. No doubt those two men at the mouth of the tunnel had seen their opportunity and seized it. Paul Ravenel had been the first victim of the massacre, no doubt. Yet Paul—to be taken unawares—with Si el Hadj Arrifa's earnest invitation to remain sheltered in his house only within this hour uttered—Paul, in a word, warned! That was not like the Paul Ravenel he knew at all! And on the next morning, following Paul's route with Mohammed for a guide, and a patrol of soldiers, he discovered the little door.

With a thrill of excitement he ran his hands over the heavy nails.

"Open! Open!" he cried, beating upon the panel with his fists; and pressing his ear against it afterwards he heard the racket echo emptily through the house. "Open! Open!" he cried again, and turning to the sergeant of the patrol, bade him find a heavy beam. Even with that used as a battering ram it took the patrol a good half-hour to smash in the little door, so stout it was, so strong the bolts and bars. But the work was done at last. Gerard darted in and found himself in a house, small but exquisite in its decorations, its thick cushions of linen worked with the old silk

embroideries of Fez, its white-tiled floors spread with carpets of the old Rabat patterns. But from roof to court the house was empty.

Gerard went through every room with the keen eye of a possible tenant with an order to view, and found precisely nothing. Had he come a week ago he would have discovered on the upper floors furniture of a completely European make. All that, however, was safely lodged now in a storehouse belonging to Si el Hadj Arrifa, and the upper floors were almost bare. Gerard had left the patio to the last, and whilst he stepped here and there he heard a tinkling sound very familiar to his ears.

" What's that ? " he cried, swinging round.

In a corner of an alcove the sergeant was bending down.

" What's that, Beauprè ? " Gerard cried again, and the sergeant stood up and faced him. He was holding in his hands the blue tunic of an officer, and on the breast of it a row of the big French medals tinkled and glinted.

Gerard took the tunic reverently from the sergeant's hands. It was all cluttered with blood and stabbed through and through. It had the badges of Paul's rank, and still discernible on a linen label inside the collar was Paul's name. It was here, then, in this house, that Paul Ravenel had been done to death. The tunic which Gerard held in his hand was the conclusive proof. He stood in the centre of the patio, so pleasant, so quiet now, with the shafts of bright sunlight breaking upon the tiles. Who had lived

here? What dreadful scene had been staged in this empty house? Gerard shivered a little as he thought upon it. The knives at their slow work—the man, his friend, slowly losing, whilst the heart still beat and the nerves stabbed, all the semblance of a man!

"But they shall pay," he said aloud in a bellowing voice; and while he shouted a perplexity began to trouble him.

He opened the door leading from the court into the outer passage. This passage was cumbered with the splintered panels, the bolts, the heavy transverse bars which the patrol's battering ram had demolished. How was it that in this empty house the door was still barricaded from within? He returned into the court and saw that the sergeant had pushed aside a screen at the back, and in a recess had discovered a second door. This door was merely locked, and there was no key in the lock. It was quickly opened. The Karouein river raced and foamed amidst its boulders, and between the river and the house wall there ran a tiny path.

Gerard crossed to the door.

"Yes, that way they went. When, I wonder? Perhaps when we were actually beating on the door."

He unpinned the medals from his friend's blood-stained tunic and wrapped them up in a handkerchief. There might be somewhere a woman who would love to keep them bright. Paul Ravenel talked little about his own affairs. Who could tell? If there were no one he would treasure them himself in memory of a good comrade.

Meanwhile there was an immediate step to take. A crowd had gathered in the gateway and about the door in the dark tunnel.

"Whose is this house?" Gerard asked, and there were many voices raised at once with the answer:

"Si Ahmed Driss of Ouezzan."

Gerard de Montignac was taken aback by the answer. Si Ahmed Driss was one of the great Shereefian family of Ouezzan, which exercised an authority and a power quite independent of the Sultan. From the first, moreover, it had been unswervingly loyal to the French. Si Ahmed Driss himself, during the days of massacre, had given shelter in the sanctuary of his own residence to all the Europeans whom he could reach. Gerard de Montignac went straight now to where he lived in the Tala and begged an audience.

"I have broken into a house which I now learn belongs to you, Si Ahmed Driss, whom may God preserve," he said.

Si Ahmed Driss was a tall, dignified old gentleman, with a white beard flowing over his chest.

"It is forgiven," he said gently. "In these days many strange things are done."

"Yet this was not done without reason," Gerard protested, and he told Si Ahmed Driss of the finding of the tunic and the story of Mohammed the servant.

Si Ahmed Driss bowed his head.

"That this should have happened in my house puts me to shame," he said. "I let it many months ago to Ben Sedira—a man of Meknes, whom . . ." and a flow of wondrous curses was invoked upon Ben Sedira

himself and his ancestors and descendants to the remotest degrees of consanguinity, by the patriarch. A bargee, could he but have understood, would have listened to them in awe and withdrawn from competition. The old gentleman, however, in uttering them, lost none of his dignity.

"Ben Sedira of Meknes," Gerard repeated. "We will see if we can find that man."

But he had very little hope of succeeding. There had been two clear days between the end of the revolt and the arrival of Moinier's column, during which surveillance could not be exercised. There were not sufficient French soldiers to hold the town gates and question all who went in and out. The moment the French tricolours floated so gaily upon all the housetops of Fez, Ben Sedira would have known the game was up. He would have gone, and gone quickly; nor would Meknes in the future house anyone of his name.

Thus, Gerard de Montignac reasoned, the affair would remain a mystery. Official inquiries would be made. But the great wheels of administration could not halt for ever at the little door in the roofed alley. Paul Ravenel would become a case, one of the infinite enigmas of Mohammedan Africa. So he thought during the next fortnight.

But Gerard was on General Moinier's staff, and many reports came under his eyes. Amongst them, one written by a Captain Laguessière, giving an account of an unsuccessful attempt to relieve a little post at the Bab Fetouh on the afternoon of the 17th,

the second day of the revolt. Gerard was reading the report in his office not over-carefully when a passage leaped out on the written page and startled him. He sat for a moment very still. Then he shook, or tried to shake, some troublesome thought from his shoulders.

"It couldn't be, of course!" he said, but he read the passage again.

And here is what he read:

I met with no trouble until I had passed the lime-kilns and crossed a bridge over the Oued el Kebir. Here further progress was stopped by three strong groups of Moors armed with rifles. It was clear to me that I could not force a way through with my twenty men and retain any hope of relieving the post. I determined, therefore, to make a detour and try to advance by way of the Bab Jedid. As I recrossed the bridge I was violently attacked from the rear, from in front of me and from a street upon my left; whilst from a house upon my right I saw a number of the Askris pour out. I ordered a charge, and leading "au pas gymnastique," I brought my men into a narrow turning, whence we were able to clear the street by repeated volleys. I had two men killed and six wounded. I received great assistance from a tall Moor, who, jumping from the crowd, charged with my men. He was armed only with a big heavy pole, but he swung it about him with so much vigour and skill that he cleared a space for us. I tried to find this Moor when I had re-formed my men, but he had disappeared as suddenly as he had come.

Gerard de Montignac sat back in his chair and ran his fingers through his sleek hair.

"Of course, it's quite out of the question," he assured himself. But none the less he rose abruptly and, leaving the report on his desk, went into another office inconveniently crowded. At the far end of the room was seated at a desk the man for whom he was looking.

"Baumann!" he called. "Can you spare me a minute?"

Baumann rose and followed Gerard back to his room.

"Take a chair there." He pointed to one at the side of his desk.

"Do you remember telling me some time ago at Casablanca that you once met Captain Ravenel close to Volubilis?"

"Yes," said Baumann. "I didn't recognise him. He twirled a great staff round his head and frightened me out of my life."

"Yes, that's it," said Gerard. "A little thing in one of these reports reminded me of your story. I wanted to be sure of it. Thank you."

Baumann rose to go, and stopped with his hand upon the door knob.

"A great loss, Captain Ravenel. There is no news of him, I suppose?"

Gerard shook his head.

"None."

"Is it known whom he dined with that last night he was seen?"

"Yes. Si el Hadj Arrifa."

Baumann nodded.

"Si el Hadj Arrifa was one of Captain Ravenel's closest friends in Fez. But there's another closer still of whom you might inquire."

"I will. Give me his name," said Gerard eagerly, and he drew a slip of paper towards him. But he did not write upon it, for Baumann answered:

"Si Ahmed Driss."

Gerard dropped his pencil and looked swiftly up.

"Of the Sheereefs of Ouezzan?"

"Yes."

"You are sure?"

"Quite."

Gerard set his elbows on the arms of his chair and joined his hands under his chin.

"So Paul was a great friend of Si Ahmed Driss, was he?" he said ever so softly.

"Yes. It was as a servant in the train of Si Ahmed Driss of Ouezzan that Captain Ravenel travelled through the Zarhoun country, and visited the holy cities."

"I see. Thank you, Baumann."

Gerard de Montignac was swimming in deep waters. He was not imaginative, but he had imagination. He comprehended, though he did not feel, the call and glamour of the East; and nowhere in the world is there a land more vividly Eastern, in its spirit, its walled cities, its nomad tribes, and its wide spaces, than this north-western corner of Africa. Gerard had lived long enough in it to see men yield to it, as to

a drug, forsake for it all that is lovely and of good repute. Was this what had happened to his friend? He wondered sorrowfully. Paul was friendly, cheerful, gay, but none the less really and truly a man of terrific loneliness. Walled about always. Gerard tried to think of an intimate confidence which Paul had ever made him. He could not remember one. He was the very man to whom the strange roads might call with the voices of the sirens. It might be . . . it might be. Gerard de Montignac never sought again for traces of his lost friend. He left the search to the administration, and the administration had other work to do.

CHAPTER XIX

In the Sacred City

The sharp lesson, then the good will; and always, even during the infliction of the lesson, fair dealing between man and man, and nothing taken without payment on the spot. This, the traditional policy of the great French governors, was carried out in Fez. Only the lesson was not so sharp as many thought it should have been. But the policy achieved its end, and it was not long before many a Fasi, like his kinsmen of the Chaiovia, would proudly assure you that he was a Frenchman. The work of settlement and order could be transferred to other regions, and Gerard de Montignac went with it. He served in the mountains about Tirza during the autumn of that year, and then went upon long leave. He was in Paris for Christmas, and there, amidst its almost forgotten lights and brilliance, took his pleasures like a boy. He hunted in the Landes, returned to Morocco, and a year later, after a campaign in the country south of Marrakesch, got his step and the command of his battalion.

For three months afterwards he was stationed at Meknes, and drew his breath. He had the routine of his work to occupy his mornings and this city of

wide spaces and orchards to engross his afternoons. Meknes, with the ruined magnificence of its palaces of dead kings, its huge crumbling stables, the great gate of mosaic built through so many years by so many captives of the Sallee pirates, and so many English prisoners from Tangier; that other gate, hardly less beautiful, to the north of the town; its groves of olives; its long, crumbling crenellated walls reaching out for miles into the country with no reason, and with no reason abruptly ending—Meknes satisfied the æsthetic side of him as no other city in that enchanted country. He delighted in it as a woman in her jewels.

But in the autumn the Zarhoun threatened trouble for the hundredth time—the Zarhoun, that savage mountain mass with its sacred cities which frown above the track from Meknes to Rabat and through which the narrow path from Tangier to Fez is cleft. It was decided that the sacred cities must at last throw open their gates and the Zarhoun be brought into line. The work was entrusted to Gerard de Montignac.

"You will have a mixed battalion of infantry, a squadron of Chasseurs, a section of mitrailleuses, and a couple of mountain guns," said the Commander-in-Chief. "But I think you will not need to use them. It will be a demonstration, a reconnaissance in force, rather than an attack."

Thus, one morning of June, Gerard led his force northwards over the rolling plain, on to the higher ground, and marching along the flank of Djebel Zarhoun, camped that night close to the tall columns and broken

arches of Volubilis. In front of the camp a mile away, dark woods of olive trees mounted the lower slopes, and above them the sacred city of Mulai Idris clung to the mountain-sides, dazzlingly white against the sombre hill and narrowing as it rose to an apex of one solitary house. In the failing light it had the appearance of a gigantic torrent which, forcing itself through a tiny cleft, spread fanwise as it fell, in a cascade of foam.

There was no fighting, as the Commander-in-Chief had predicted. At nine o'clock the next morning the Basha, followed by three of his notable men, rode down on his mule through the olive groves, and being led to the tent over which floated the little red flag of the Commander, made his obeisance.

"I will go back with your Excellency into the city," said Gerard, and he gave orders that a company of mitrailleurs should escort him.

Thus, then, an hour later they set out, Gerard riding ahead with the Basha upon his right, the notables behind, and behind them again the company of tirailleurs advancing in column of platoons with one Captain Laguessière at their head. When they reached the first of the rising ground, Gerard reined in his horse and stared about him.

The Basha, a portly man with a black beard, smiled with a flash of white teeth and the air of one expecting compliments. He did not get them, however. Gerard's face wore, indeed, a quite unfriendly look. He turned round in his saddle.

"Captain Laguessière."

Laguessière, who had halted his company, rode up to Gerard's side.

"Do you see?"

"Yes, my Commandant. I have been wondering for the last few minutes whether it was possible. If these fellows had put up a fight we might have lost a lot of men."

"Yes," said Gerard shortly.

To the right and left of the track which led up to the gate of the town, very well placed, just on the first rise of the ground, were fire trenches—not roughly scooped, shallow depressions, but real trenches scientifically constructed, deep and recessed and with traverses at short intervals. The inside walls were revetted; arm-rests had been cut for the riflemen, the earth dug from the trenches had been used for parapets, and these had been turfed over for concealment; there were loopholes, artfully hidden by bunches of grass or little bundles of branches and leaves. Communication trenches ran back, and—nothing so struck Gerard de Montignac with surprise as this—the extra earth had been built into parapets for dummy trenches, so that the fire of the attacking force might be diverted from those which were manned.

The surprise of the two officers caused the Moors the greatest satisfaction. The three notables were wreathed in smiles. The Basha laughed outright.

"They are good," he said, nodding his head.

'Too good," replied Gerard gravely. "But it is as well that you did not use them against us."

To the Moors this rejoinder seemed the very cream of wit. The Basha rocked in his saddle at the mere idea that his trenches could have been designed against the French.

" No, indeed ! We are true friends of your Excellency and your people. We know that you are just, and very powerful too. These trenches were intended to defend our sacred city from the Zemmour."

" Oh, the Zemmour ! Of course," exclaimed Gerard, openly scoffing.

The Zemmour were turbulent and aggressive and marauders to a man. They lived in the forest of Mamora and sallied out of it far afield. But they were also the bogey-men of the country-side. You threatened your squalling baby with the Zemmour, and whatever bad thing you had done, you had done it in terror of the Zemmour.

The Basha was undisturbed by Gerard de Montignac's incredulity.

" Yes, the Zemmour are very wicked people," he said, smiling virtuously and apparently quite unconscious that he himself presided over a city of malefactors and cut-throats. " But now that you have taken us poor people under your protection we feel safe."

Gerard smiled grimly, and Captain Laguessière stroked his fair moustache and remarked :

" He has a fine nerve, this old bandit."

" And when did you expect the Zemmour ? " asked Gerard.

" Two weeks, three weeks ago. They sent word that

they would attack us on a certain night, so that we might be ready."

"And then they didn't come?" said Gerard.

"No."

Captain Laguessière laughed, incredulous of the whole story. But Gerard recognised a simple form of humour thoroughly Moroccan. To warn your enemy that you meant to attack him, to keep him on the watch and thoroughly alarmed all night and then never to attack him at all—that might well seem to the Zemmour a most diverting stroke of wit. The Zemmour, after all, were not so very far from Zarhoun.

"I wonder," said Gerard.

"I don't, my Commandant," replied Captain Laguessière. "I think that if they hadn't seen our mountain guns passing up the track below we should have found these trenches manned this morning."

Gerard turned about on his horse and looked down on to the plain.

"Yes. They could see very clearly. That's the explanation—so far." He gave his attention once more to the construction of the trenches. "And who taught you to make those trenches, my friend?" Gerard asked, looking keenly at the Basha. The Basha answered composedly:

"It was Allah who put it into our heads. Allah protecting the holy city where Mulai Idris lies buried."

"That's all very fine," Captain Laguessière observed. "But then who lent Allah his copy of the Manual of Field Engineering?"

"Exactly," Gerard agreed with a laugh. "I think

we had better find that out. No Moor that ever I met with would take the time and trouble, even if he had the skill, to work out——" and the laugh died off his lips. He turned suddenly startled eyes upon his companion. "Laguessière!" he exclaimed, and again in a lower key, "Yes, Laguessière! I was sure that I had never met you before."

"Not until this expedition, my Commandant."

"Yet your name was familiar to me. I did not think why. I was too busy to think why. But I remember now. You were in Fez, two years ago. Yes, I remember now."

His face darkened and hardened and grew very menacing as he sat with moody eyes fixed upon the ground and seeing visions of old and pleasant days leap into life and fade. "Volubilis, too!" he said in a low voice. "Yes, just below those olives." Strange that he should have seen the columns and broken arches yesterday and again this morning, and only thought of them with wonder as the far-flung monuments of the old, untiring Rome! And never until this moment as things of great and immediate concern to him—signs perhaps for him to read and not neglect. For of all the pictures which he saw changing and flickering upon the ground, two came again and again. He saw Baumann and his friends riding in the springtime between clumps of asphodel towards those high pillars, and a horde of wild, ragged men pouring out of the gates of this white-walled city, and Baumann shrinking back as a tall youth whirled with a grin a great staff about his head. Then he saw the same

man, whirling the same staff, charge with Laguessière's section in a street of Fez. A grim and sinister fancy flashed into his mind. He wondered whether he had been appointed by destiny to demand, here and to-day, an account for the betrayal of a great and sacred trust. He looked up the hill to where the big wooden gates stood open.

"Is that the only entrance into Mulai Idris?" he asked of the Basha.

"The only one."

Gerard de Montignac turned to his subordinate.

"You will set a guard upon that gate, Captain Laguessière. No one is to go out until I give a further order."

"Very well, my Commandant.

"You will have the town patrolled and the walls watched. I will bring up another company to act with you." He wrote an order with a pencil in his note-book, detached the leaf and sent it back by an orderly to the camp. "Now we will move on," he said. All his good humour had vanished. He had no longer any jests to exchange with the Basha as the little cavalcade rode upwards among the olive trees and through the steep narrow streets of the town.

In an open space just below that last big house which made the apex of the triangle, a seat was placed, and to this Gerard de Montignac was conducted. The little city lay spread out in a fan beneath him. The great mosque in which the tomb of the founder of the Moorish empire was sheltered stood at the southern angle. Gerard looked down into a corner of its open

precincts and saw men walking to and fro. He called the Basha to his side and pointed down to it.

"Yes, that is the great mosque, your Excellency."

"No one will violate it. For us it is sacred as for you," said Gerard. "But no food must go into it. That is a strict order."

"It shall be obeyed."

"I shall place men of my own in the streets about the entrances. They will molest no one, but they will see to it that the order is obeyed."

The mosque was sanctuary, of course. Any man who took refuge there was safe. Neither the law nor any vengeance could touch him. But no man must die in it, for that would be a defilement. A little time, therefore, and any refugee would be thrust out by the guardians of the sanctuary, lest his death should taint the holy place.

Gerard sent a messenger down with a new order to Laguessière at the gate and waited on the seat until it had been carried out and Laguessière had ridden to his side. The two officers lunched with the Basha and his notables in the big house and drank his five cups of tea with them afterwards.

"I will now ride with you through the town," said Gerard to the Basha. "You shall tell me of the houses and of those who live in them. And you shall take me into those I wish, so that I may speak to them and assure them of our friendship."

"That will be an excellent thing," replied the Basha.

Gerard kept a sergeant and a small guard of soldiers

with him, and, with the Basha on his mule beside him, he rode down on the left side of the town. For on this side only, he had seen, were there any houses of importance. The rest of the town was made up of hovels and little cottages. The three chief men who rode with the Basha pointed out their own residences with pride; the owners of others were described, and at each of them Gerard smiled and said he was content. They made thus a complete circuit of the city.

"Your Excellency has not thought fit to enter any one of the houses," said the Basha with a smile of reproach.

Gerard led him a little apart.

"I will make good that omission now," he replied. "There was one which we passed. You did not speak of it at all. Yet it was a good house, a fine house, finer almost than any except your Excellency's own."

The Basha was apparently mystified. He could not remember.

"I think that I can find the house again," said Gerard. "I hope that I shall be able to, for it attracted me." He looked the Basha in the eyes. "That is the house which I wish to enter and whose owner I wish to see."

Finality was in Gerard's voice as clearly as in his words. The Basha bowed to it.

"It is for your Excellency to give orders here. We are all in God's hands," he said, and he drew a step nearer to Gerard de Montignac. "It is permitted to dismiss my friends now to their homes? Si Tayeb

Reha, whom we shall visit, will not be prepared for so many."

"Si Tayeb Reha?" Gerard repeated. "That is his name? I had a thought it might be Ben Sedira."

The Basha shook his head.

"That is not a name known in Mulai Idris."

He turned again to his notables and took leave of them with ceremonious speeches. Then he mounted his mule again and rode down the hill beside Gerard, with the sergeant and the escort at their heels. Gerard said not a word now. He was thinking of those carefully constructed trenches outside the city, and his face grew hard as granite. They came to a house of two stories, with one latticed window in the uppermost floor, and for the rest a blank wall upon the street. It was, for Fez, a small house; for Mulai Idris, one of importance. The door opened upon a side-street, and the sergeant knocked upon it whilst Gerard and the Basha dismounted. There followed a long silence whilst a little crowd gathered about the soldiers. Gerard wondered what message that sharp, loud knocking brought to the inmate. Had he seen the cavalcade ride past from a corner of that latticed window and with a smile upon his lips believed himself to be safe? What a shattering blow, then, must have been this sudden knocking upon his door! Or was he himself altogether in error? Gerard drew a breath of relief at the mere hope that it might be so. Well, he would know now, for the door was opened. And in a moment all Gerard's hopes fell. For the native who opened it was surprised into a swift movement as his eyes fell

upon Gerard in his uniform. It was a movement which he checked before he had completed it, but he was too late. He had betrayed himself. It was the involuntary movement of an old soldier standing to attention at the sudden appearance of an officer.

The Basha spoke a few words to the servant who stood inside. There was no court in this house. A staircase faced them steeply, and on the right hand of it was the kitchen. Gerard turned to the servant as he passed in.

"And what is your name?"

"Selim," answered the servant. He led the way up the dark staircase. There was no window upon their staircase; the only light came from the doorway upon the street. At the top there was a landing furnished with comfort and in the middle of the landing a fine door. Selim knocked upon it and would have opened it, but Gerard laid his hand upon his arm and with a gesture in place of words bade him stand aside. He opened the door himself and entered. He was standing in a room of low roof but wide. It was furnished altogether in the Moorish style and with a certain elegance. But the elegance was rather in the disposition of the room than in the quality of its equipment. One great window, with a balcony protected by a rail, gave light to the room, and it looked not upon the street, but across a great chasm to the mountain, for the house was built upon the town wall. The light thus flooded the room. Close to the window a tall Moor was standing. He bowed and took a step forward.

"Had I hoped that your Excellency would do me the honour to visit my poor house," he said with a smile, "I should have made a better preparation."

He had a small beard trimmed neatly to a point and a thin line of moustache. Gerard did not answer him for a little while. He took out his notebook and wrote in it and detached the leaf. Then he sent Selim down the stairs to fetch up the sergeant of his escort; and it was noticeable that, scrupulous as he usually was in this land of observances, he made use of the servant as his messenger without troubling himself to ask the master's permission.

When the sergeant came up into the room, Gerard handed him the sheet of paper.

"You will send this by one of your men immediately to Captain Laguessière at the gate."

"Very well, my Commandant," and the sergeant went out of the room.

Gerard turned to the Basha.

"I have sent an order to remove the posts from the neighbourhood of the mosque, and to throw open the gates so that men may go out and in as they will."

The Basha expressed his thanks. There would be no trouble. The people of Mulai Idris were very good people, not like those scoundrels from the forest of Mamora, and quite devoted to the French.

"Since this morning," Gerard answered with a smile. "We shall have much to say to one another to-morrow morning in a spirit of help and good will. But I beg you to leave me now, so that I may talk for a little

while privately with Si Tayeb Reha. For I have come now to the end of this day's work."

Si Tayeb Reha bowed gravely. It was the only movement he had made since he had spoken his words of welcome upon Gerard's first entrance into the room.

The Basha took his leave, went downstairs and mounted his mule.

" We are all in God's hands," he said, and he rode slowly away towards his house. Within the room the two men stood looking at one another in silence.

CHAPTER XX

The Coup de Grace

The longer the silence grew, the more difficult Gerard de Montignac felt it was to break. He had entered the room clothed with authority, sensible of it and prepared to demand explanations and exact retribution. But he had now a curious uneasiness. His authority seemed to be slipping from him. Opposite to him, without a movement of his body and his face still as a mask, stood *le grand serieux*, as half in jest and half in earnest he used to label Paul Ravenel. He had not a doubt of his identity. But *le grand serieux* was altogether in earnest *le grand serieux* at this moment.

A quiet, tragic figure drawn to his full height, wearing his dignity with the ease of an accustomed garment, when he should be—what? Crushed under shame, faltering excuses, cringing! Gerard de Montignac said to himself, "Why, I might be the culprit! It might be for me to offer an explanation, or to try to." He almost wondered if he was the culprit, so complete was his discomfort and so utterly he felt himself at a disadvantage. He whipped himself to a sneer.

"I am afraid that I am not very welcome, Si Tayeb Reha," he said, speaking in French.

"Si Tayeb Reha! Yes! That is my name," returned the Moor in the Mohgrebbin dialect of Arabic.

"*Alias* Ben Sedira of Meknes. *Alias* Paul Ravenel."

The Moor frowned in perplexity.

"*Alias*," he repeated doubtfully, "and Pol Rav——" He gave the name up. "What are these words? If your Excellency would speak my language——"

"Your language!" Gerard interrupted roughly. "Since when have the outcasts a language of their own?" He flung himself into a chair. He was not going to take a part in any comedy. He continued to speak in French. "You thought you were safe enough here, no doubt. Oh, it was a clever plan, I grant you. Who would look for Paul Ravenel in the sacred city of Mulai Idris? Yet not so safe after all if anyone knew that you had once travelled the Zarhoun in the train of Si Ahmed Driss of Ouezzan."

He leaned forward suddenly as some prosecuting counsel in a criminal court might do, seeking to terrify a defendant into an expression or a movement of guilt. But Si Tayeb Reha was simply worried because he could not understand a word of all the scorn which was tumbling from Gerard's mouth. The officer was angry—that was only too evident—and with him, Si Tayeb Reha! If only he could make it all out! Gerard grew more exasperated than ever.

"No, not safe at all if anyone had seen you come out of these gates in the rabble to drive away a visitor to Volubilis. Baumann, eh? Do you remember Baumann of the Affaires Indigènes, Paul Ravenel?"

Si Tayeb Reha raised his hands.

"Your Excellency speaks in a tongue I do not understand."

"You understand very well. Sanctuary, eh? If one guessed you had run to earth here—sanctuary! No one dare violate the sacred city of Mulai Idris. Once sheltered within its walls, safe to lead the dreadful squalid life you've chosen right to its last mean day! Your mistake, Paul Ravenel! The arm of France is stretched over all this country."

Gerard stopped abruptly and flung himself back in his chair in disgust. He was becoming magniloquent now. In a minute he would be ridiculous, and over against him all the while stood this renegade, dwarfing him by his very silence and the stillness of his body, putting him in the wrong—for that was it!—putting him in the wrong who was in the right.

Gerard had imagination. He was hampered now by that accursed gift of the artist. Even whilst he spoke he was standing outside himself and watching himself speak, and act, and watching with eyes hostilely critical. Thus were things well interpreted, but not thus were they well done. Thus they were made brilliantly to live again, but not thus were they so contrived as to be worthy to live again. Since by that road come hesitations and phrases that miss their mark.

He tried to sting Si Tayeb Reha into a rejoinder.

"Trenches, too! Fire trenches on the latest plan—so that if by chance we should come and be fools enough to come without guns——" he broke off and beat upon the table with his closed fist—"you would fight France,

would you, to keep your burrow secret? The insolence of it! The Zemmour, indeed! Fire trenches and traverses and the rest of it against the Zemmour."

Si Tayeb Reha leapt upon a word familiar to his tongue.

"The Zemmour! Yes," he cried, smiling his relief. Here was something which he could understand. "The Zemmour threatened us two, three, four weeks ago. We made ready to welcome them, but they did not come. They were very wise, the Zemmour!" and he chuckled and nodded.

Gerard found this man of smiles and cunning easier to talk with than the aloof masked figure of a minute ago.

"It was you who constructed those trenches, and against us, who were once your comrades," he said sternly.

Si Tayeb Reha was once more at a loss.

"If your Excellency will not speak my tongue, how shall I answer you?" he asked plaintively, and Gerard did not trouble to answer.

"I ought to send you down to Meknes for a court-martial to deal with you," he said reflectively. "But all strange crimes have their lures. They breed. God knows what decent-living youngster might get his imagination unwholesomely stirred and do as you have done and bring his name to disgrace! Besides—do you know who guards the gate of Mulai Idris whilst I talk to you? Who but Laguessière? Captain Laguessière." He searched the still face for a tremor, a twitch of recognition.

Si Tayeb Reha had apparently given up the attempt to understand. He stood leaning against the wall at the side of the window and looking out across the ravine to the mountain-side.

"Laguessière, at whose side you charged twisting your staff—do you remember?—back over the bridge by the limekilns in Fez two years ago."

The light fell full upon the face of the man at the window. It seemed to Gerard de Montignac impossible that any man, even the *grand serieux*, who had so often carried his life in his hands through the solitary places, could have learnt so to school his features and keep all meaning from his eyes.

"Yes, that charge counts for you, and something else which shouldn't count at all. You and I were at St. Cyr together."

Indeed that counted most of all. The sense of an old comradeship broken, the traditions of a great college violated—these had been the true cause of Gerard de Montignac's discomfort. The years were beginning to build the high barriers about Gerard, shutting off great tracts of which he had once had glimpses to make the heart leap, taking the bright colour from his visions. A treasure house of good memories was something nowadays to value, and here was one of the good memories, almost the most vivid of them all, destroyed. He rose from his chair, and as he rose, a curtain moved which covered an archway moved and ever so slightly parted. It was just behind Si Tayeb Reha's shoulder, and a little to his right at the side of the room; so that he did not notice the

movement. Gerard de Montignac could look through the narrow opening. He had a glimpse of a woman with her face veiled, an orange scarf about her head, a broad belt of gold brocade about her white robe. Somehow the sight of her helped him, though he saw her but for a second, before the curtains closed again. It spurred him to that statement which from the outset he had been working to.

"So that's it!" he cried. "A woman, eh? Two years since she took your fancy! She must be getting on now, mustn't she? What's her age? Seventeen? And for that, honour, career, a decent life, all into the dustbin!"

He drew his heavy revolver from the pouch at his belt and laid it on the table.

"It is loaded," he said. "You have just the time until my sergeant notices that I have left my revolver behind in this house. If I come back, and—no shot has been fired—then it is Meknes with all its shame and the same end."

Nothing surprised Gerard de Montignac more than the coolness with which Si Tayeb Reha, as his old comrade called himself, received his sentence of death. He advanced to the table where the revolver lay, and took the weapon up with a smile of curiosity and admiration.

"We make no such weapons as these," he said in Arabic, examining the pistol with all a Moor's fascination for mechanical instruments. "That, your Excellency, is why we are never a match for you and we must open our gates at your summons."

He had never said one word except in Arabic during the whole of the interview, just as Gerard had stubbornly refused to speak anything but French. Gerard watched him toying with the weapon for a second, and then turned rapidly away. He could not but admire his old friend's courage; he could not but think, "What a waste of a good man!" He went out of the room without another word or another look. He was sick at heart. He no longer cared whether he had been peevish or argumentative or what kind of figure he had cut. One of the glamorous things in his life, his belief in the *grand serieux*, had been taken from him. He mounted his horse and rode away, wishing for that shot to explode as quickly as possible, so that he might bury the dreadful episode out of sight and forget it altogether.

But though he listened with both his ears, and though he walked his horse as slowly as he could, he heard nothing. He saw his sergeant suddenly look at his belt. It was coming then without a doubt. The next moment the sergeant was at his side and looking into his face.

"My Commandant, you have left your revolver behind in that house."

Gerard de Montignac took all the time that he could. He stared at the sergeant and made him repeat his statement as though he had been lost in thought and had never heard it at all. Then he looked down at the holster and fingered it as if he were trying to recollect where in the world he had taken the revolver out.

"Why, that's true," he said at last. He wheeled his

horse around and rode back very dispiritedly with his chin sunk upon his breast. "It is to be Meknes after all then, and all the public shame," the sergeant heard him mutter; and then a pistol cracked sharp and clear and Gerard raised his face. It was lit with a great relief.

They were only ten paces from the house. Gerard dismounted and gave the reins to the sergeant.

"Wait for me here! Keep the door clear!" he ordered. He had left the door of the house open when he rode away. It was open still. Gerard ran up the stairs and burst into the room. There was a smell of gunpowder in the air, and the Moorish woman with the orange scarf and the white robe and the deep gold waistband was standing with her hands pressed over her face.

But there was no sign of Si Tayeb Reha anywhere. They had tried to trick him then! They imagined that he would accept the evidence of the pistol-shot and continue on his way! They took him for no better than a child, it seemed. No, that would not do.

"Where is he?" he asked angrily of the girl, and now he too spoke in Arabic.

She pointed a trembling hand towards the window; and Gerard saw that the rail of the balustrade of the balcony was broken and that the revolver lay upon the boards. Gerard stepped out from the window and looked down.

The balcony had been built out from the sheer wall; it was a rough thing of boards, supported upon iron stanchions, and jutting out above the deep chasm at

the edge of the town. Gerard could see between the boards deep down a precipice of rocks to a tiny white thread of stream and clumps of bushes. He drew close to the broken rail and leaned cautiously over. Caught upon some outcropping rocks a little way below the wall, hung the body of Si Tayeb Reha. He was lying face downwards, his arms outspread. The story of what had happened was written there for him to read. Paul Ravenel had shot himself on the balcony, the revolver had fallen from his hand, his body had crashed through the flimsy rail and toppled down until it had been caught on the rocks below. Yes, no doubt! The mere fall from that height, even if Ravenel had been unhurt, would have been enough. Yet—yet—there had been a long delay before the shot was fired. Gerard looked keenly and swiftly about the room. No, there was no sign of a rope.

He looked at the girl. She was now crouched down upon her knees, her face hidden between her hands, her body rocking, whilst a wail like a chant, shrill of key but faint, made a measure for her rocking. She was like an animal in pain—that was all, and for her Paul had thrown a great name to the winds! What a piece of irony that she, with hardly more brain and soul than a favourite dog, should have cost France so much!

Gerard stooped and picked up his revolver. He broke the breech, ejected the one exploded cartridge and closed the breech again with a snap. He leaned forward again to take a last look at that poor rag of flesh and bone, hung there for the vultures to feed upon, which once had been his friend—and he was

aware of a subtle change in the woman behind him within the room. Oh, very slight and for so small a space of time! But just for an imperceptible moment her wail had faltered, the rocking of her body had been stayed. She had been watching him between those fingers with the henna-dyed nails which were so tightly pressed over her face.

He looked at her closely without moving from his position. It was all going correctly on again—the lament, the swaying, the proper conventional expression of the abandonment of grief. Yet she had been watching him, and for a moment she had been startled and afraid. Of what? And the truth flashed upon him. He had been fingering his revolver. She was afraid of the *coup de grâce*.

Then they were tricking him between them—she with her wailing, he spread out on the bulge of rock below. They should see! He stretched out his arm downwards, the revolver pointed in his hand. And out of the tail of his eye he saw the woman cease from her exhibition and rise to her feet. As he took his aim, she unwound the veil from before her face. He could not but look at her: and having looked, he could not take his eyes from her face. He stumbled into the room.

"Marguerite Lambert!" he said in a voice of wonder. "Yes, Marguerite Lambert!"

CHAPTER XXI

Written in the Book

Gerard de Montignac had never been so thoroughly startled and surprised in his life. But he was angrily conscious of an emotion far keener than his surprise. He was jealous. Jealousy overmastered the shock of wonder, stabbed him through and left him aching. Marguerite Lambert, the girl of the Villa Iris, so politely difficult! And Paul Ravenel, the man without passion! Why, his brother officers used to laugh at him openly—nay, almost sneered at him and made a butt of him—because of his coldness; and he, indifferent to their laughter, had just laughed back and gone his way. Well, he could afford to, it seemed, since he was here, and for two years had been here, hidden quite away from the world with Marguerite Lambert. They had stolen a march upon their friends, the pair of them; they had tricked them—yes, that was the exact, right word—tricked them, even as they had just tried to trick him: she with her Oriental abandonment to grief—little "animal" as he had called her in his thoughts—he stretched out on a knob of rock above a precipice in a pose of death! Gerard was in an ugly mood, and he spoke out his thought in a blaze of scorn.

"I asked you the last time I saw you to give me

two days of your life, my only two days. I asked no more. Yet you were insulted. You could give two years to another, but two days to me? Oh, dear no! You wished never to speak to me again."

"I would give two days to no man," Marguerite replied gently, "though I would give my whole life to one man."

"Even though he deserted?" Gerard asked with a sneer.

"Paul had not deserted when I gave myself to him," she answered quietly. "When he did, it was to save me!"

Gerard did not want to hear anything about that. Some conjecture that the truth of this catastrophe was to be discovered there, had been at the back of his mind really ever since he had recognised Marguerite. But he intended not to listen to it, not to let it speak at all. Somehow her use of Paul's name angered him extremely. It dropped from her lips with so usual and homely a sound.

"No doubt it was to save you. It would be!" he said sardonically. "Some decent excuse would be needed even between you two when you sat together alone through the long dark evenings."

Gerard meant to hurt, but Marguerite wore an armour against him, and his arrows were much too blunt to pierce it. She had a purpose of her own to serve, of which Gerard de Montignac knew nothing; she was clutching at a desperate chance—if, indeed, so frail a thing could be called a chance—not of merely saving her lover's life, but of so much more that she

hardly dared to think upon it. Her only weapon now, and for a long heart-breaking time to come, was patience.

"You are unjust," she said without any anger, and without any appeal that he should reconsider his words.

Gerard suddenly remembered the last words that the black-bearded Basha had spoken as he climbed on to his mule:

"We are all in God's hands."

Marguerite had spoken just in his tone. Argument and prayer were of no value now. It was all written, all fated. What would be, would be. Either Gerard de Montignac would drop that revolver from his hand, and her desperate chance become a little less frail than before, or he would not.

"What was it that woman in the spangled skirt used to say of you?" Gerard asked with a seeming irrelevance.

"Henriette?"

"Yes, Henriette. You had a look of fate. Yes! She was right too. It was that look which set you apart, more than your beauty. Indeed, you weren't beautiful then, Marguerite."

He was gazing at her moodily. The sharp anger had become a sullenness. Marguerite had grown into beauty since those days, but it was not the roseleaf beauty born of days without anxiety and nights without unrest. It was the beauty of one who is haunted by the ghosts of dead dreams and who wakes in the dark hours to weep very silently lest someone overhear. Destined for greater sorrows or perhaps greater joys

than fall to the common lot! That was what Henriette had meant! And looking at Marguerite, Gerard with a little ungenerous throb of pleasure perceived that at all events the greater joys, if ever they had fallen to her, had faded away long since.

"These have been unhappy years for you, Marguerite," he said.

"For both of us," she answered. "How could they have been anything else? Paul had lost everything for which he had striven, whilst I knew that it was I who had caused his loss."

"But he didn't lose you."

"He didn't have to strive for me," Marguerite returned with just the hint of a smile and more than a hint of pride. "I was his from his first call—no, even before he called."

Gerard could not but remember the first meeting of this tragic couple in the Villa Iris. Paul Ravenel had stood behind Marguerite's chair, and without a word, without even turning her head to see who it was that stood behind her, she had risen from the midst of the Dagoes and Levantines, as at an order given. She had fallen into step at his side and no word had as yet passed between them. Gerard de Montignac recollected that even then a little pang of jealousy had stabbed him, and sharply enough to send him straight out of the cabaret.

"Yes . . . yes," he said slowly. "I had never spoken to you then, had I? It wasn't until afterwards. . . ." He was thinking, and drawing some queer sort of balm from the thought, that Marguerite had

not so much flatly refused him his two days as set her heart on Paul Ravenel before she had met him. If it had been he, for instance, who had stood behind Marguerite's chair and silently called! But then he hadn't! No, he hadn't. He had gone away and left the field clear for Paul Ravenel. Other memories came back to him to assuage his wrath.

"After all, it was I who brought you and Ravenel together," he said. "For it was I who persuaded him to come with me on that first night to the Villa Iris."

"Yes!" Marguerite drew in her breath sharply. "He told me that he almost didn't come."

It would have been better if he had not come, if he had stayed quietly in his house and gone on with his report. So her judgment told her. But she could never imagine those moments during which Paul had stood in doubt, without picturing them so vividly that she had a quiver of fear lest he should decide not to come.

"It was I, too, who sent Paul Ravenel to you at the end," Gerard de Montignac continued; and as Marguerite drew her brows together in a wrinkle of perplexity, "Yes," he assured her. "The night after you didn't want to speak to me any more, I went back to the Villa Iris to find you. Did you know that? Yes, I was leaving the next morning with the advance guard for Fez. I didn't know what might happen on the march. I wanted to make friends with you again, so that if anything did happen to me, you wouldn't have any bitter memories of me."

"That was a kind thought," said Marguerite.

"Kind to myself," returned Gerard with, for the first time in this interview, the ghost of a smile. Yet to Marguerite it was as the glimmer of dawn upon a black night of sickness and pain.

There was a hope, then, that the revolver would be returned to its holster with its remaining five cartridges still undischarged. Gerard's own memories were at work with him—memories of a kindlier self, with enthusiasms and generous thoughts; and they must be left to do their work. There was little that she could say or do—and that little not until his mood had changed.

"I didn't find you," Gerard resumed. "You had gone. Henriette told me how you had gone and why. Yes, the whole horrible story of that old harridan and the Greek! And you had dropped your bundle and disappeared. And Henriette feared for you. I was leaving at six in the morning; I was helpless. I went on to Paul Ravenel and told him that he must find you before any harm came to you. And he did, of course. That's clear. So I had my share in all this dreadful business. Yes . . . yes, I hadn't realised it."

He sat down on a chair by the table and stared at its surface with his forehead puckered. But he still held the butt of his revolver in his hand. If only he would lay it down just for a moment! Marguerite had a queer conviction that he would never take it up again to use outside the window, once he let go of it. But he did not let go. His fingers indeed tightened

upon the handle, and he cried, "I don't know what to do."

Neither did Marguerite. She could let Gerard de Montignac remain in his error, or she could dispel it. She was greatly tempted not to interfere. It was a small matter anyway. Only, small matters count so much in great issues. Let the scales tremble, the merest splinter will make one of them touch ground. Marguerite trusted to some instinct which she could not afterwards explain.

"Perhaps I am unwise," she said. The note of hesitation, for the first time audible, drew Gerard's eyes to her troubled face. "But I don't know. . . . The truth is you had no real share in our—" she paused for a word which would neither blame nor excuse— "in our disaster. The night I was turned out, Paul was waiting for me in the garden. I didn't expect him. I was in despair. I dropped my bundle; and he rose up out of the darkness in front of me. I loved him. It was the wonderful thing come true. He took me away to a house which he had got ready——"

"A house near to his on the sea-wall?" suddenly exclaimed Gerard.

"Yes."

"That's true then. I saw his agent and him coming out of it. I think that I told Henriette, never dreaming that the house was meant for you, that you were already in it when I told Henriette." He looked at Marguerite suddenly with eyes of pity. "You two poor children!" he exclaimed softly; and after a few moments he added with a whimsical smile, "I told

Paul that he would break his leg when we, the less serious ones, only barked our shins. It is a bad thing not to walk in the crowd, Marguerite!"

He watched her for a little while like a man in doubt. Then he reached his arm out and tapped with the muzzle of his revolver—for he still held it in his hand—on the part of the table opposite to him.

"You must sit down and tell me exactly what happened."

Marguerite obeyed. She told Gerard of her journey up from the coast to Fez when Paul was sure that the road was safe, and how she came to the little palace with the door upon the roofed alley which Paul had got ready for her. Gerard, who had thought to listen to her story without question or comment, could not restrain an exclamation.

"You were in Fez then all that year!" he said, wondering. "In the house of Si Ahmed Driss! I never dreamt of it. Even when I discovered it and searched it, that never occurred to me. When I saw you both here, I imagined that Paul had slipped away at a bad moment for France, without a thought of his duty, to join you at Mulai Idris in accordance with a plan."

Marguerite shook her head.

"No. I was in the house at Fez. Later, on that night of the 16th, he knew that the massacres were certain. He went to Head-quarters with the information. If they had listened to him then, he would never have deserted at all. But they wouldn't listen, and he had to choose."

She described how on the next day the fanatics had rushed in searching for a French officer who had been seen once or twice to visit there.

"It was not before that night then, the night he came to the Head-quarters, that he was sure?" Gerard interrupted quickly.

"No."

"They would have come to seek him in the house, even if he had ridden straight back from the Hôpital Auvert to Dar-Debibagh."

"Yes."

"Then he did save your life by deserting," said Gerard.

And, on the other hand, he asked himself was there any duty not discharged because Paul did desert? Was there any mistake made because the little Praslin led Paul Ravenel's company along the river-bed, instead of Paul himself?

"My God! but it's difficult!" cried Gerard. "Complexities upon complexities! How shall one judge—unless——" and he caught with relief at his good rules and standards—"yes, unless one walks in the crowd. It's the only way to walk. Thou shalt do this! Thou shalt not do that! All clear and ordered and written in the book."

Gerard had gibed enough in his day at those innumerable soldiers who answered every problem of regulations and manœuvres immediately with a complacent "It's so laid down," or "It's not so laid down in the book." He was glad to get back in the windings of this case to the broad highway of "the book."

The book told him how to deal with Paul Ravenel. Well, then! Yet—yet——!

Marguerite watched his face cloud over, and hurriedly continued her story, or rather began to continue it. For at her first words as to how Paul had outwitted the invaders of the house in Fez, Gerard interrupted her with a cry:

"The uniform tunic, eh, Marguerite? The tunic all hacked and battered with blood?" He uttered a little wholesome laugh of appreciation. "And all prepared in readiness the night before. Yes, I recognise Paul there."

This was the third time that Gerard de Montignac had spoken of "Paul" without any "Ravenel" added to it to show that he and Paul were strangers. Marguerite, you may be sure, had counted each one of them with a little leap of the heart. "And the blood!" he went on. "I think I know whence that came. His arm, eh? Wasn't it so?"

Marguerite had determined to use no tricks with him, but she could not resist one now, the oldest and simplest and the never-failing. She looked at Gerard with awe and admiration—so sharp he was and penetrating!

"Yes. Oh, but how did you know? It's rather wonderful."

"When he was standing against the window there the sleeve of his djellaba fell back. There was a scar like a white seam on his forearm."

"Yes."

Marguerite breathed her wonder at this prodigy of insight, and like a good artist, having made her point,

she did not labour it. She related with what reluctance Paul had afterwards told her the thing which he had done.

" I knew nothing of it before. I thought that he was on leave. I should have killed myself whilst there was yet time for him to return to camp, if I had known. Even when I did know, I hoped that he could make some excuse, and I tried to kill myself. But he had, of course, foreseen that, and prepared against it."

Gerard nodded.

" How ? "

" He had taken my little pistol secretly from the drawer where I kept it. He did not give it me back again until I promised that I would not use it unless the Moors were on the stairs."

Gerard de Montignac started suddenly and pushed his chair sharply back. Some quite new consideration had flashed into his mind. He looked at Marguerite with a sentence upon his lips. But he did not speak it. He turned away and took a turn across the room towards the window and back again, whilst Marguerite waited with her heart in her mouth.

" What am I to do ? " he asked. And to Marguerite the fact of his actually addressing the question to her made the interview more of a nightmare than ever. He was standing close to her, breaking the breech of his revolver and snapping it to again, and almost unaware of who she was, and quite unaware that with each click and snap of the mechanism she could have screamed aloud. " What am I to do, Marguerite ? "

Marguerite mastered her failing nerves.

"Those trenches outside Mulai Idris," she said. "They were dug to resist the Zemmour. The people here might have used them against you but for Paul. He warned the Basha that he couldn't win, that he would find you just and fair and careful of all his rights. Do you believe that?"

Gerard reflected.

"Yes, I do," he said slowly. "After all, he charged with Laguessière when Laguessière was put to it."

"Charged with Laguessière?" repeated Marguerite.

"Yes—in Fez—one afternoon during the revolt. He had a great staff and used it—used it well. So much of the old creed remained with him, at all events."

Yes, thought Marguerite, there had been an afternoon when Paul had been on edge and she had sent him out. He had come back, appeased and a new man. The riddle of that change was now explained to her. But she had no leisure to dwell upon the explanation.

Gerard had swung away again from her, and was now standing close to the window, looking out across the chasm to the dark blue of the hill in the shadow opposite. One little step would carry him on to the balcony, and the butt of his revolver was still in his hand.

"Listen to me, Marguerite," he said in a low voice; and suddenly he became, to her thought, more dangerous in his calm than he had been in his anger. "Here's a law broken by you and Paul, and see what misery has come of it! What loss! Shall I repair

that law by breaking another? Hardly! Look at me, Marguerite."

But he did not look at her. He even advanced a foot beyond the window-ledge so that the boards of the balcony creaked and groaned beneath its pressure.

"I could have lived in Paris, with Deauville for the summer and Monte Carlo for the winter, and my own lands for the autumn—a pleasant, good life. I could have lived with women about me—the fine flower of them, the women who are exquisite and delicate. But I didn't. I left the enjoyments to the others. I came out into these hot countries, the countries of squalor, to serve France. And I have served; yes, by God, I have served! That has been my creed. Shall I let another spit on it, even though he was my greatest friend? Not I!"

Marguerite gave all up for lost. The one chance at the eleventh hour was not to be tried out by Paul and her. Well—she was very tired. She closed her eyes that she might not see anything of what happened at the window—anything more in the world. If ever she had worn the look of one set apart by fate, as so many had declared, she wore it now, stamped upon the submission of her face. Her hands went to her girdle and felt within its folds—and that action saved her lover and herself, for Gerard de Montignac saw it as he was stepping out on to the boards of the balcony.

"Wait!" he cried in a sharp, loud voice, and in a moment he was standing in front of her with a look of horror in his eyes. "The little pistol which Paul

took away from you and gave you back only on your promise—where is it ? "

Marguerite neither moved nor answered him.

" It is there," he cried, pointing to where her hand rested within her belt. It was that bedrabbled woman in the spangled skirt who had prophesied it. Henriette, yes, Henriette ! It was strange over how many years that poor waif's words had reached and with what effect. " No ! " he cried. " You must go your ways. I'll not have that upon my soul the day I die." And he turned from her and rushed from the room, and in a few moments Marguerite heard the sound of a horse galloping away down the cobbled street as though its rider had no thought for his neck.

* * * * *

Gerard de Montignac talked for many hours the next day with the Basha in the house at the city's top. But neither he nor the Basha spoke once of Si Tayeb Reha. They came to a good understanding, and Gerard rode back to his camp, his work in Mulai Idris done. He sat in his camp-chair outside his tent that night, watching the few lights upon the hill-side go out one after the other and Mulai Idris glimmer, unsubstantial as the silver city of a dream. Gerard had carried off a small sort of triumph which would mean many good marks in the books of his great commander. But he was only thinking to-night of the two outcasts in the house on the city wall. Whither would they seek a refuge now that the gates of Mulai Idris were to stand open to the world ? And was it

worth their while? Marguerite's haunted face, and Paul Ravenel burrowing deeper and deeper into obscurity. Gerard turned to Laguessière, who was smoking at his side.

"Walk in the crowd, my friend! It is always less dangerous to walk in the crowd. Well, let us turn in, for we start early to-morrow."

In the morning the tents were gone and Gerard's column was continuing its march through the Zarhoun.

CHAPTER XXII

The Splendid Throw

What had happened between the moment when Gerard de Montignac rode away from the door of Si Tayeb Reha's house the first time and the moment when the pistol shot rang out? It had all been Marguerite Lambert's idea—a despairing clutch at some faint and far-off possibility, hardly a hope, yet worth putting to the proof. She had heard every word which Gerard had spoken. She had seen the revolver laid upon the table. She had seen even more than that, for when Gerard had gone from the room Paul had taken the revolver at once in his hands. It would be a very little while before the sergeant noticed that Gerard's revolver was missing from its pouch. He had not even time to write more than one "good-bye" to Marguerite. There were friends who would look after her—the Basha himself, Selim, his own servant. The road to the coast passed across the plain below the city, and there was a letter for her, long since written, with his instructions, on the top of his desk. He paused after he had written his one word to make sure that he had forgotten nothing. The addresses of his agents and his lawyers were written in the letter, and all that he had, his property

in the English funds, his houses in Fez and Casablanca, was bequeathed to her in a will of which Mr. Ferguson had charge.

No, nothing had been forgotten—except that Marguerite herself was watching him from behind the curtains. She came into the room.

Paul handed to her the paper with the one word "good-bye" written upon it.

"Marguerite, Gerard de Montignac has been here."

"I know. I heard."

"Then you understand, my dear. This is the end for me."

"For both of us, then, Paul."

He began to argue, and stopped. The futility of his words was too evident. She would follow him, whatever he might say. He began to thank her for the great love she had lavished on him, and he stopped again.

"I could never tell you what you have meant to me," he said helplessly. "But if it was all to do again, I should do as I did. For nothing in the world would I have left you alone through those days in the house of Si Ahmed Driss. Only it is a pity that it must all end like this." He took her in his arms and kissed her and put her from him. "Will you leave me now, my dear? At any moment the knock may come upon the door."

It was then that Marguerite's inspiration came to her. She besought him to hold his hand. She fetched a rope and an axe. Often she had noticed from the window that ledge of rock breaking the precipice

below. Paul was inclined to revolt against the trick which she was asking him to play. It was not likely to succeed with Gerard de Montignac. It would only add one more touch of indignity to their deaths. But Marguerite was urgent.

"I am not thinking of just saving our lives, Paul, so that we may fly and hide ourselves again in some still darker corner for a little while," she said eagerly. "I'll tell you of my hope, my plan, afterwards. Now we must hurry."

Paul doubled the rope over one of the iron stanchions of the balcony close to the wall, whilst Marguerite locked the door. He climbed over the rail, and taking a turn of the doubled rope round the upper part of his right arm and another turn round his right thigh, he let himself down until he hung below the balcony. He kept his arms squared and his hands below the level of his chin, and placing the flat of his feet against the wall of the house, he was able, by slackening the coils round arm and thigh, to descend without effort to the ledge of rock, where he lay huddled in a counterfeit of death.

"Don't move until you hear my voice calling to you," she whispered. Then she drew up the rope and broke down the rail of the balcony with some blows of the axe, and, unlocking the door, hid away both axe and rope in another room. She came back swiftly, and then, taking up the heavy revolver, fired it out of the window and let it fall upon the boards of the balcony. She dropped on to her knees, and thus Gerard de Montignac found her. All through that

scene, whilst life and death were in the balance for these two, Paul Ravenel lay motionless upon the ledge of rock below the city wall. He dared not look up; he heard Gerard's voice raised in anger and scorn; he expected the shock of the bullet tearing through his heart. But the voice diminished to a murmur. Gerard had gone back into the room. Some debate was in progress, and while it was in progress, from this and that far quarter of the sky the vultures gathered and wheeled above the precipice. . . .

After a while he heard Marguerite's voice, and looking up, saw that she was letting down the rope to him. She had tied knots in it at intervals to help him in his ascent, and he clambered up to her side.

"Gerard has gone?" he asked.

"Yes. He will not come here again."

"Then he believed you?"

"No. He left us in pity to live our lives out as best we could," said Marguerite.

Paul nodded his head.

"Others will be coming and going now," he said. "This city will become a show place very likely. We can't remain in Mulai Idris because of those others."

"And we can't remain anywhere else because of ourselves," said Marguerite quietly.

Paul was not startled by the words. They were no more than the echo of words which he had been trying during this last half-hour not to speak to himself. They had built up with elaborate care a great pretence of contentment, watching themselves so that there might be no betrayal of the truth, watching each

other so that, if the truth did at some unendurable moment flash out, no heed should be taken of it; and hoping even, without any conviction, that one day the contentment would grow real. But all that patient edifice of pretence was a crumble of dust now. The outer world, in the person of Gerard de Montignac in his uniform, had rushed in, with its hard logic, its scorn for duty abandoned, its emblems of duty fulfilled; and there was no more any peace for Paul Ravenel and Marguerite Lambert. To live for thirty or forty years more as they had been living! It was in both their thoughts that it would have been better for Gerard de Montignac to have done straightway what he threatened, and for Marguerite to have followed her lover as she had determined.

Paul sat down at the table with his eyes upon Marguerite. She had some hope, some plan. So much she had said. Was it, he wondered, the plan of which he from time to time had dreamed, but for her sake had never dared to speak? He waited.

"You are a man, Paul—" she began, "oh, generous as men should not be, but a man. And you sit here idle. A great personage in Mulai Idris, no doubt. The power behind the throne—the Basha's throne!" The hard words were spoken with a loving gentleness which drew their sting. "A man must have endeavour—I don't say success—but endeavour of a kind, if only in games. Otherwise what? He becomes a thing in carpet slippers, old before his youth is spent—and this you would dwindle to for me! No, my dear!"

Paul made no gesture and uttered no word. She was to speak her thought out.

"You laugh and joke with these people here. For five minutes at a time no doubt you can forget," she continued. "But you can never exchange thoughts with your equals; you can never talk over old dreams you have had in common, old, hard, and tough experiences which you have shared. And these things, Paul, are all necessary for a man."

Again Paul Ravenel neither denied nor agreed. He left to her the right of way.

"And in spite of all you still love me!" she cried in a sudden fervour, clasping her hands together upon her breast. "Me, whom you should hate! I clutch the wonder of that to my heart. I must keep your love."

Paul Ravenel smiled.

"There's no danger of your losing it, Marguerite."

Marguerite shook her head.

"But there is—oh, not at once! But I am warned, Paul. There's the light showing on the reef. I keep my course at more than my peril."

Paul went back upon his words, and his looks. What could he have said, he who so watched himself?

"And this warning?" he asked with a smile, making light of it.

"We dare not quarrel," she answered slowly. "That human, natural thing is barred from us. The sharp word flashing out, the shrug of impatience, the few tears perhaps from me, the silent hour of sulkiness in you, the making up, the tenderness and remorse—

these things are for other lovers, Paul; never, my dear, for you and me. We daren't quarrel. We must watch ourselves night and day lest we do! For if we did, the unforgivable word might be spoken. I might fling my debt to you in your face. I might be reminded of it, anyway. No, we must live in a constraint. Other lovers can quarrel and love no less. Not you and I—a man who has given his honour and career, and a woman who has taken them!"

The argument silenced Paul Ravenel, for there was no disputing it. How daintily the pair of them had minced amongst words! With what terror of a catastrophe if the tongue slipped!

"So . . . ?" he asked.

"Yes," said Marguerite with a nod. "So! So, Paul, let us stake all on one splendid throw! Go down if we must, but if we do, in a fine endeavour, and perhaps after all win out to the open street!"

She spoke with a ring in her voice which Paul had not heard for a long while.

"How?" he asked, and the light leaped in his eyes. So much hung upon the answer.

"The French are recruiting Moorish soldiers——" and she got no further, for Paul sprang from his chair, his face one flame of hope.

"Marguerite!" he cried in a thrilling voice, and then sank down again with his face buried in his arms. "Marguerite!" he whispered, and the tenderness and gratitude with which the utterance of her name was winged she caught into her memories and treasured there against the solitude which was to come.

She moved round the table and laid her hand upon his bowed head and let it slip and rest upon his heaving shoulder.

"So the thought has been in your mind too, Paul?" she said with a smile

"Yes."

"And for a long time?"

"Yes."

"And you would not speak it. No! I must find that way out for myself," she said, gently chiding him, "lest you should seem to wish at all costs to be rid of me." She walked away from his side and drew a chair up to the table opposite to him. "Let us be practical," she said very wisely, though her eyes danced. "It would be possible for you to enlist without being recognised."

Paul lifted his head and nodded.

"Over in the south by Marrakesch."

"And you could continue to escape recognition."

"I think so. Even if I was recognised, very likely those who recognised me would say nothing. I remember a case once——"

"Here?" cried Marguerite. "There was a case then—an example to follow—and even so you would not tell me."

"I didn't mean I know of a case here. I was thinking of another country—India. If that man could, I could, for I am even better equipped than he was."

Paul Ravenel could say that with confidence. He knew more of the Moors, had more constantly lived

their life and spoken their dialects, than Colonel Vanderfelt had known of the Pathans upon the frontier of India. The example of Colonel Vanderfelt had been long in Paul Ravenel's thoughts. How often had he watched with an envy not to be described, both when he waked and when he slept, that limping figure, with the medals shining upon his breast, walk down the dark City street from the brilliant lights of the Guildhall! How often had this room in the remote hill town of Mulai Idris been suddenly filled with the fragrance of a Sussex garden, whilst he himself looked out, not upon the hill-side of Zarhoun, but upon a dim and dewy lawn where roses clustered! He had done the bad thing which his father did, and, like his father, lost his place in the world. Could he now win back that place by the expiation of his father's friend? Was it not of excellent omen that the solution which he had remembered Marguerite had herself devised? But she must weigh everything.

"It may be long before opportunity comes," he warned her, "such opportunity as will restore to me my name. It may never come at all. Or death may come with it."

Marguerite looked round the room and out of the window to the barren hill.

"Is not this death, Paul?" she answered simply, and he was answered.

"You must make me a promise, too, before I go, Marguerite," he continued. "More than once you've said you couldn't go on living if——"

Marguerite interrupted him.

"I promise."

"Then I go."

A great load was lifted from both of them. They set straightway about their preparations. Marguerite was to set out first with Selim and her women. The road over the red hill to Tangier was no longer safe at all since it passed through a portion of the Spanish zone. But five days of easy travel would take her to Casablanca through a country now peaceful as a road in France. She would go to Marseilles, she said, and wait there for news of Paul. They passed that evening with a lightness of spirit which neither of them had known since they had laughed and loved in the house of Si Ahmed Driss before the massacres of Fez.

"There is one thing which troubles me," said Paul, catching her in his arms and speaking with a great tenderness. "Long ago in Fez you once told me of a girl who, when her husband died, dressed herself in her wedding gown——"

"Hush!" said Marguerite, and laid her hand upon his lips.

"You remember, then?" said Paul. He took her hand gently away, and Marguerite bent her head down and nodded. "'I couldn't do that, my dear,' you said. I have never forgotten it, Marguerite. I should have dearly loved if, before we parted—that had been possible."

Marguerite raised her face. There were tears in her eyes, but her lips were smiling, and there was a smile, too, in her eyes behind the tears.

" I know ! The world proscribes not love
Allows my finger to caress
Your lips' contour and downiness
Provided it supply a glove.

" The world's good word !—the Institute !
Guizot receives Montalembert !
Eh ? Down the court three lampions flare :
Put forward your best foot ! "

She quoted with a laugh from the poet whose brown books had been the backbone of their library, and then drew his head down to hers and whispered :

" Thank you, Paul ! The world shall supply its glove—afterwards, when you come back to me."

" But if I don't come back. . . ."

" Well, then, my dear, since you have been the only man for me, and I have been the only woman for you, we must hope that the good God will make the best of it." She laughed again, and her arms tightened about his neck. " But come back to me, my dear ! " she whispered. " I am young, you know, Paul—twenty-three. I shall have such a long time to wait if you don't, now that I have promised."

They were ready within the twenty-four hours. The tail of Gerard de Montignac's column had hardly disappeared before Marguerite, with her little escort, her tents and camp outfit, rode out of the gate of Mulai Idris and turned northwards past the columns of Volubilis. Paul rode with her to the top of the breach in the hills whence the track zigzagged down to the plain of the Sebou. There they took their leave of one another. At each turn of the road Marguerite looked upwards and saw her lover upon his horse,

his blue cape and white robes fluttering about him, outlined against the sky. The tears were raining down her face now which she had withheld so long as they were together, and in her heart was one deep call to him: "Oh, come back to me!" She looked up again, and the breach in the hills was empty. Her lover had gone.

CHAPTER XXIII

The Necessary Man

In the summer of that same year, the thundercloud burst over Europe; and France, at her moment of need, reaped the fine harvest of her Colonial policy. Black men and brown mustered to the call of her bugle as men having their share of France. Gerard de Montignac scrambled, like his brother officers, to get to the zone of battles. He was seconded in the autumn, was promoted colonel a year later and was then summoned to Paris.

In a little room upon the first floor in a building adjacent to the War Office, Gerard discovered Baumann of the Affaires Indigènes—but an uplifted Baumann, a Baumann who had grown a little supercilious towards colonels.

"Ah, de Montignac!" he said, with a wave of the hand. "I have been expecting you. Yes. Will you sit down for a moment?"

Gerard smiled and obeyed contentedly. There were so many Baumanns about nowadays, and he never tired of them. Baumann frowned portentously over some papers on his desk for a few moments, and then, pushing them aside, smoothed out his forehead with the palm of his hand.

"Yours is a simpler affair, de Montignac, I am happy to say," he said with a happy air of relief. "The Governor-General is in Paris. You will see him after this interview. He wants you again in Morocco."

"It is necessary?" Gerard asked unwillingly.

"Not a doubt of it, my dear fellow. You can take that from me. The Governor-General is holding the country with the merest handful of soldiers, and there are—annoyances."

"Serious ones?"

"Very. Bartels, for instance."

"Bartels?" Gerard repeated. "I never heard of him."

Far away from the main shock of the battles many curious and romantic episodes were occurring, many strange epics of prowess and adventure which will never find an historian. Bartels was the hero of one, and here in Baumann's clipped phrases are the bare bones of his exploit.

"He was a non-commissioned officer in the German army . . . enlisted on his discharge in our Foreign Legion—was interned in August, 1914, and got away to Melilla."

"In the Spanish zone, on the coast. Yes," said Gerard.

"He was safe there and on the edge of the Riff country. He got into touch with a more than usually turbulent chieftain of those parts, Abd-el-Malek, and also with a German official in Spain. From the German official Bartels receives by obscure routes

fifteen thousand pounds a month in solid cash—minus, of course, a certain attrition which the sum suffers on the way."

"Of course," said Gerard.

"With the fifteen thousand—call it twelve—with the twelve thousand pounds a month actually received, and Abd-el-Malek's help, Bartels has built himself a walled camp up in the hills close to the edge of the French zone, where he maintains two thousand riflemen well paid and well armed."

Gerard leaned forward quickly.

"But surely a protest has been made to Spain?"

Baumann smiled indulgently.

"How you rush at things, my dear de Montignac."

"It will be 'Gerard' in a moment," de Montignac thought.

"Of course a protest has been lodged. But Spain renounces responsibility. The camp is in a part of the country which she has officially declared to be not yet subdued. On the other hand, it is in the Spanish zone—and we have enough troubles upon our hands as it is, eh?"

Gerard leaned back in his chair.

"That has always been our trouble, hasn't it—the unsubdued Spanish zone?" he said moodily. "What does Bartels do with his two thousand riflemen?"

"He wages war. He comes across into French Morocco, and raids and loots and burns and generally plays the devil. And, mark you, he gets information, he chooses his time cleverly. When we are just about to embark fresh troops to France, that's his favourite

moment. The troops have to be retained, rushed quickly up country—and he, Bartels, is snugly back on the Spanish side of the line, and we can't touch him. Bartels, my dear de Montignac—" and here Baumann of the Affaires Indigènes tapped the table impressively with the butt of his pencil—" Bartels has got to be dealt with."

" Yes," Gerard replied. " But how doesn't seem quite so obvious, does it ? "

Baumann gently flourished his hand.

" We leave that with every confidence to you, my dear Colonel."

Gerard pushed his chair back.

" Oh, you do, do you ? I don't know that I've the type of brain for that job," he said, and thought disconsolately how often he had jeered at the officers who simply passed everything that wasn't in " the book." He would very much have liked to take the same line now. " How does this fellow Bartels get his twelve thousand pounds ? "

" Through Tetuan, probably. We don't quite know," said Baumann.

" And where exactly is his camp on the map ? " Gerard asked next.

" We are not sure. We can give you, of course, a general idea."

" We have nobody amongst his two thousand men, then ? "

" Not a soul. So, you see, you have a clear field."

" Yes, I see that, and I need hardly say that I am very grateful," said de Montignac.

Baumann was not quick to appreciate irony even in its crudest form. He smiled as one accepting compliments.

"We do our best, my dear Gerard," and Gerard beamed with satisfaction. He had heard what he had wanted to hear, and he would not spoil its flavour. He rose at once and took up his cap. "I will go and see the Governor-General."

"You will find him next door," said Baumann. "We keep him next door to us whilst he is in Paris, so far as we can."

"You are very wise," said Gerard gravely, and he went next door, which was the War Office. There he met his chief, who said :

"You have seen Baumann ? Good ! Take a little leave, but go as soon as you can. Ten days, eh ? I will see you in a fortnight at Rabat." And the Governor-General passed on to the Elysée.

Gerard de Montignac did not, however, take his ten days. He knew his chief, a tall, pre-eminent man, both in war and administration, who, with the utmost good-fellowship, expected much of his officers. Gerard spent one day in Paris and then travelled to Marseilles. At Marseilles he had to wait two days, and visited in consequence a hospital where a number of Moorish soldiers lay wounded, men of all shades, from the fair Fasi to the coal-black negro from the south. Their faces broke into smiles as Gerard exchanged a word or a joke with them in their own dialects. He stopped a little abruptly at the foot of one bed in which the occupant lay asleep with—a not uncommon sight in

the ward—a brand-new *médaille militaire* pinned upon the pillow.

" He is badly hurt ? " Gerard asked.

" He is recovering very well," said the nurse who accompanied him. " We expect to have him out of the hospital in a fortnight."

Gerard remained for a moment or two looking at the sleeper, and the nurse watched him curiously.

" It will do him no harm if I wake him up," she suggested.

Gerard roused himself from an abstraction into which he had fallen.

" No," he answered with a laugh. " If I was a general I would say yes. But sleep is a better medicine than a crack with a mere colonel. What is his name ? "

" Ahmed Ben Larti," said the nurse, and with a careless " So ? " Gerard de Montignac moved along to the next bed. But before he passed out of the ward he jerked his head towards the sleeper and asked :

" Will he be fit for service again ? "

" Certainly," she answered. " In a month, I should think."

Gerard left the hospital, and the next morning was back in Baumann's office in Paris.

" I have found the man I want," he said.

" Who is he ? "

" Ahmed Ben Larti. He is in hospital at Marseilles. He has the *médaille militaire*."

Baumann shrugged his shoulders. " Who has it not ? " he seemed to say.

"I had better see the Governor-General," said Gerard.

Baumann became mysterious, as befitted a high officer of intelligence.

"Difficult, my young friend," he began.

"Excellent, Baumann, excellent," interrupted Gerard with a chuckle.

Baumann pouted.

"I don't quite understand," he said.

"And there's no reason that you should," Gerard answered politely.

Baumann was not very pleased. It was his business to do the mystifying.

"It's practically impossible that you should see the Governor-General again. He is so occupied," he said firmly.

Gerard got up from his chair.

"Where is he?"

"Ah!" said Baumann wisely; "that is another matter."

"Then you don't know?" exclaimed Gerard, standing over him.

"No," answered Baumann, and it took Gerard the rest of that day before he ran his chief to earth.

Like other busy men, the Governor-General had the necessary times to give to necessary things, and in a spare corner of the Colonial Office he listened with some astonishment, asked a few questions and wrote a note to the War Office.

"This will get you what you want, de Montignac. For the rest, I agree."

Forty-eight hours later Gerard had a long interview with Ahmed Ben Larti in a private ward to which the Moor had been removed; and towards the end of the interview Ahmed Ben Larti made a suggestion.

"That's it!" said Gerard enthusiastically. Then his spirits dropped. "But we haven't got any. No, we haven't got one."

"The Governor-General," the Moor suggested.

"I'll send him a telegram," said Gerard de Montignac.

Now, this was in the spring of 1916, when Bartels was in the full bloom of power. His camp was full, for the danger was small, the pay high and the discipline easy. The Moor brought his horse and his rifle, was paid so many dollars a day, and could go home if the pay failed or his harvest called him. But in the autumn Bartels, in his turn, began to suffer annoyance. Thus, on one occasion a strange humming filled the air, and a most alarming thing swooped out of the sky with a roar and dropped a bomb in the middle of the camp.

Bartels ran out of his hut with an oath. "They've located us at last," he growled. Not one of his soldiers had ever seen an aeroplane before, except perhaps the man who was cowering down on the ground close to him with every expression of terror. Bartels jerked him up to his feet.

"What's your name?"

"Ahmed Ben Larti."

"They make a great noise, but they hurt no one," Bartels declared. "Tell the others!"

The others were running for their lives to any sort of shelter. For, indeed, this sort of thing was worse than cannon. And unfortunately for Bartels' encouragements, the aeroplane was coming back. It dropped its whole load of bombs in and around that camp, breaching the walls and destroying the huts and causing not a few casualties into the bargain. There was an exodus of some size from that camp under cover of the night, and Bartels the next morning thought it prudent to move. He moved westwards into the country of the Branés, and there his second misfortune befell him. His month's instalment of money did not come to hand. It should have travelled upon mules from Tetuan, and a rumour spread that the English had got hold of it. Nothing, of course, could be said; Bartels had just to put up with the loss and see a still further diminution of his army. Within a month the new camp was raided by aeroplanes, and Bartels had to move again. From a harrier of others he had sadly fallen to being harried himself.

"There is a traitor in the camp," he said, and he consulted Abd-el-Malek and stray German visitors from Tetuan and Melilla. They suspected everybody who went away before the raids and came back afterwards. They never suspected men like Ahmed Ben Larti, who was always present in the camp on these occasions of danger, not over-conspicuously present, but just noticeably present, running for shelter, for instance, or discharging his rifle at the aeroplane in a panic of terror. Bartels, however, carried on with

constantly diminishing forces until the crops were ripening in the following year. Then the aeroplanes dealt with him finally. Wherever he pitched his camp, there very quickly they found him out and burnt the crops for a mile around. The villages would no longer supply him with food; his army melted to a useless handful of men; he became negligible, a bandit on the move. Ahmed Ben Larti called off the little train of runners which had passed in his messages to French agents in Tetuan, and one dark evening slipped away himself. His work was done, and almost immediately his luck gave out.

A telegram reached Gerard de Montignac at Rabat a week later from the French Consul in Tetuan, which being decoded read:

Larti brought in here this morning. He was attacked two miles from here and left for dead. Recovery doubtful.

The last of Ahmed's messengers had been lured into a house in Tetuan, and upon him Larti's final message announcing the date of his own arrival had been discovered. Further telegrams came to Rabat from Tetuan. Larti had lost his left arm just below the shoulder, and his condition was precarious. He began to mend, however, in a week, but three months passed before a French steamer brought to Casablanca a haggard, thin man in mufti, with a sleeve pinned to his breast, who had once been Captain Paul Ravenel of the Tirailleurs.

Gerard de Montignac met him on the quay and walked up with him to the cantonment at Ain-Bourjda.

" We have got quarters for you here," said Gerard. " There's nobody you know any longer here."

" Yes ! " said Paul.

" We can rig you out with a uniform. The General will want to see you."

" Yes ? " said Paul.

" You know that you have been on secret service the whole time. The troubles at Fez were the opportunity needed to make your disappearance natural."

Paul sat down on the camp bed.

" That was arranged in Paris before you went to Bartels," said Gerard. " Oh, by the way, I have something of yours."

He opened a drawer of the one table in the tiny matchboard room, and unfolding a cloth, handed to Paul the row of medals which he had taken from Paul's tunic when he had searched the house of Si Ahmed Driss in Fez.

Paul sat gazing at the medals for a long while with his head bowed.

" I have got another to add to these, you know—the *mêdaille militaire,*" he said with a laugh, and his voice broke. " I shall turn woman if I hold them any longer," he cried, and rising, he put them back in the drawer.

Gerard de Montignac turned to a window which looked out across the plain of the Chaiovia. He pointed towards the north-west and said : " Years ago, Paul, you saved me from mutilation and death over

there. I forgot that in Mulai Idris, and you didn't remind me."

"I, too, had forgotten it," said Paul. He looked about the cabin; he drew a long breath as though he could hardly believe the fact that he was there. Then he said abruptly: "I must send a telegram to Marseilles!"

Gerard de Montignac stared at him.

"Marseilles?"

"Yes. Marguerite has been living there all the time."

"But you were in hospital there, and no one visited you, I know. The nurse told me."

Paul Ravenel smiled.

"Marguerite never knew I was there. I was always afraid that she would come there by chance. Fortunately she was driving a car. I was just Ahmed Ben Larti. The time had not come." He looked at Gerard and nodded his head. "But I can tell you it was difficult not to send for her. There she was, just a few streets and just a few housewalls between us. There were sleepless nights, with the light shining down on all those beds of wounded men, when I could have screamed for Marguerite aloud."

He sent off his telegram from the Cantonment Post Office and then strolled into the town with Gerard de Montignac. The Villa Iris was closed; Madame Delagrange had vanished. Petras Tatarnis was no doubt driving his Delaunay-Belleville through the streets of Paris. Paul looked at his watch and put it back into his pocket with impatience. It was out in the palm of his hand again. He was counting the

minutes until a telegram could be delivered in Marseilles. He was wondering whether she was already aware—as she had been aware when he had stood behind her on the first night that they met.

* * * * *

A fortnight later Mr. Ferguson the lawyer received a telegram which put him into a fluster. He was an old gentleman nowadays and liable to excitement. He sent for his head clerk, not that pertinacious servant Mr. Gregory—he had long since gone into retirement—but another from whom Mr. Ferguson was not inclined to stand any nonsense.

"I shall want to-morrow all the necessary forms for securing English nationality," he said, "and please get me Colonel Vanderfelt on the trunk-line."

The clerk went out of the office. The old man sat in a muse, looking out of the window upon the plane trees in the square. So here was Virginia Ravenel's son coming home, invalided, with a wife. How the years did fly, to be sure! Yet though the plane trees were a little dim to his eyes, he heard a voice fresh as the morning through that dusty room, and saw the Opera House at Covent Garden filled with people wearing the strange dress of thirty years ago.

THE END

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HODDER & STOUGHTON, LTD., PUBLISHERS
WARWICK SQUARE LONDON, E.C.4

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